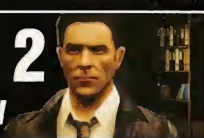


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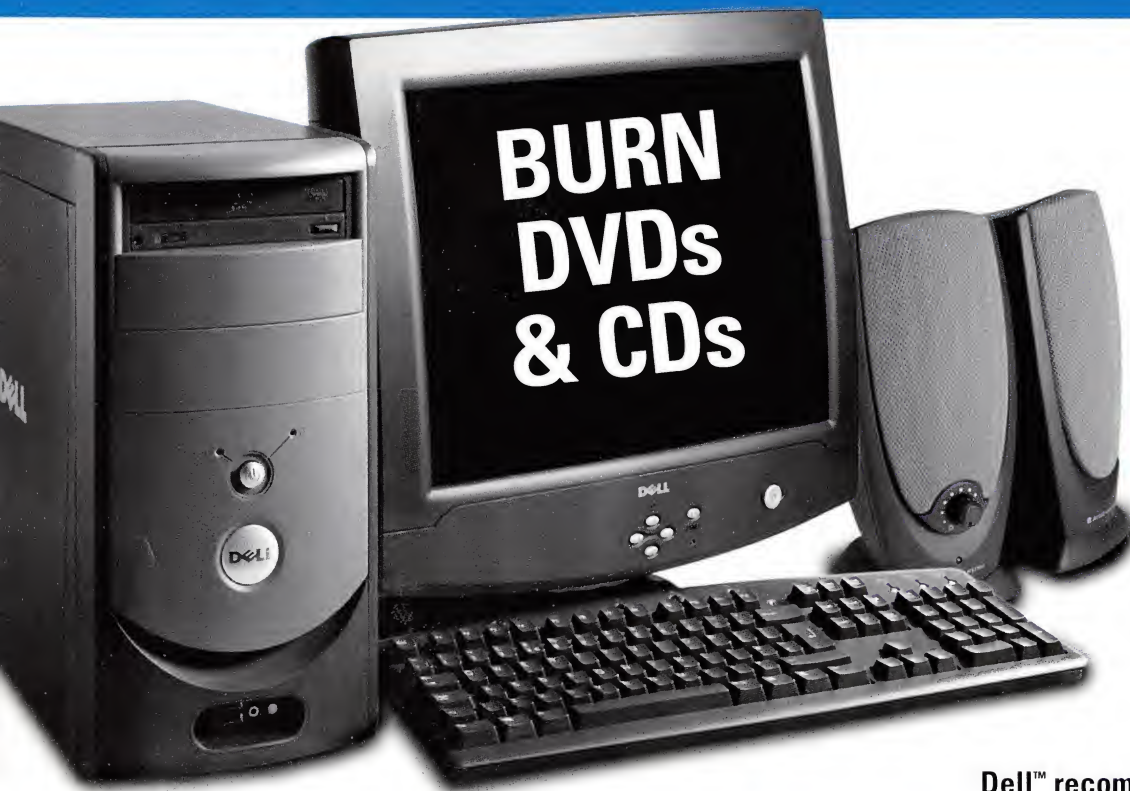
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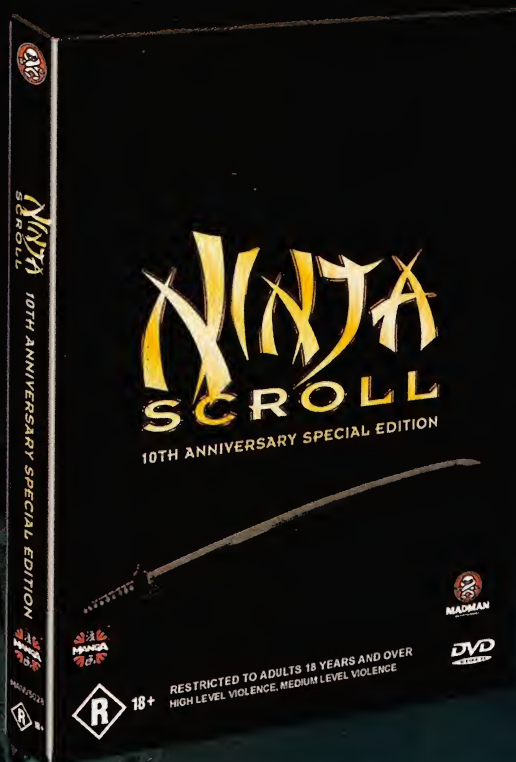


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## When duty calls

Let's talk about Call of Duty. What, you think PCPP#92's glowing report and cover was enough? Oh, and last issue's playable demo, and this month's Under The Hood interview and stellar 94% review? Perhaps we've gone slightly overboard with our coverage of Activision's WWII shooter, but to be honest it's been a long time since a game demanded such lengthy hyperbole. We feel justified in our lavish praise.

Call of Duty is the best shooter since Half-Life. No, seriously, this time we really mean it, this truly is the best shooter in five years. Make sure you check out Under The Hood on page 60 to discover just how Infinity Ward stretched, augmented and exploded the geriatric Quake 3 engine beyond its limits. Then buy the game and prepare to be hugely impressed.

In spite of our carefully cultivated cynicism, we're also impressed with the The Sims sequel. No matter how many expansion packs EA releases, nor how many casual gaming mums play it to the exclusion of all else, when you listen to Will Wright discussing his creation it's impossible not to find yourself



succumbing to his charm. The Sims 2 sounds genuinely engaging. The lack of defined objectives in the original, or indeed any real reason to keep playing, proved a turn off for most hardcore gamers like ourselves. The mere introduction of aging sims and genetic inheritance looks set to extend the game's lifespan, so to speak, by adding meaning to your actions. We're impressed and intrigued by the possibilities. You haven't seen the last of The Sims in PCPP, that's for sure.

<Checks word count.>

Hey, Ruth, are 300 words enough?

It is? Excellent. Time to replay Call of Duty on the hardest difficulty.

P.S. Everyone say hi to Ruth, our new Art Director.

**David Wildgoose,**  
Editor  
davidw@next.com.au

### The ones to blame:



**David Wildgoose**  
EDITOR

"I'm back from Tokyo... sigh..."

Playing: Call of Duty



**Prumpy**  
THE DWARF

"I really miss Dina..."

Playing: Call of Duty



**Daniel Wilks**  
SENIOR WRITER

"New photo please, I've had my hair cut again"

Playing: Max Payne 2



**Bennett Ring**  
DEPUTY EDITOR

"I love the smell of Nazi in the morning"

Playing: Call of Duty



**Ruth Barbato**  
ART DIRECTOR

"Be alert not alarmed"

Playing: Tom Waits



**Timothy C. Best**  
SENIOR WRITER

"One day we'll review Judge Dredd..."

Playing: Commandos 3



**Amos Hong**  
DISC EDITOR

"Feed me!"

Playing: Madden 2004



**Joel Graham**  
ADVERTISING MANAGER

"Got any games lying around?"

Playing: Halo



**Anthony Fordham**  
SENIOR WRITER

"I was a teenage grandad"

Playing: With virtual trains

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# INBOX

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## HEROES

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### STASHED IN LIMBO

I'm writing in regards to Guerilla Gamer's opinion piece "On The Level" in PCPP#92. GG, first let me say that I appreciate, at least partly, where you're coming from. I still remember clearly the days I spent in pursuit of such-and-such GoldenEye level with a raging hard-on for the time I could rub my newly acquired golden PP7 in the other Bond wannabes faces at school. Nevertheless, I take issue with the shit you felt entitled to talk about Half-Life.

Now, it's true that all too many games have been developed from diseased concepts like "interactive movies", but HL doesn't deserve to be lumped together with such follies, let alone described as "worst offender", by any stretch of the imagination. A movie, even an interactive one, relegates you to the role of observer, but HL cast you as a participant all the way. Even during cutscene-ish moments, you never leave Freeman's shoes. You never watch things happen to him, things are always happening to YOU. I've also heard complaints about Freeman's laconic nature, how you never know what he's thinking or feeling. To those of you, I say, why the hell would you want to? You are him and he is you. YOU'RE the one meant to do the thinking. YOU'RE the one meant to do the experiencing. YOU'RE the one meant to feel the fear of what's in store when you overhear how personally the Marines are taking your actions. You'd trade in such immersion for a couple of scripted lines?

Movies can only dream of providing the experience HL did. And it wasn't that of an interactive movie, more like a primitive form of virtual reality, the ultimate roleplaying game. Just about every step HL took away from the old FPS mold was made with that thought in mind, and if you ask me, Valve succeeded admirably



My, Gordon, don't we have a big head!

with the limited resources and technology available to them at the time. The point was driven home with simple details like that there are no levels, the game never pulls you out of your role to give you a rundown of



what's happening next, and there is no end to the "game", you're just stashed in limbo "awaiting assignment" and have to manually quit the game to end it - simple little things whose effect most developers even nowadays don't understand enough to try to emulate when cannibalising HL's formula.

And I don't even know where to begin assaulting your claim that "there was no anticipation of cool stuff to come" while playing HL, it's just so completely and utterly stupid. When did you first play the game - last week? At the time of release,

HL was nothing but "cool thing" after "cool thing" after "cool thing". Sure HL is looking dated now, but if you didn't experience it in the proper historic context, why try to challenge its legend? You only embarrass yourself with your ignorance. And if I'm wrong and you were there when HL hit the market, yet deny the importance of its innovations, then feel free to go back and replay any of the zillion shooters dealing with scores, power-ups, secrets and no context to speak of which the industry left behind after HL. No, it doesn't make you a bad person to long for such things, but your tastes aren't exactly under-represented. And considering the effort needed to get a game made nowadays, I'm of the mind that that effort is better spent exploring the new dimension HL revealed within first-person gaming with the strides it took to rise above the title of (or as you would have it, "pretend not to be") a game, rather than providing me with just another chance to outscore an asshole cousin. That's just my opinion, but considering the number of successful HL look-alikes out there, I'm tempted to think that context isn't exactly being forced on the rest of the gamer population either.

Invisigoth

### DID THIS HACKER THINK

I would just like to express my personal disgust at the actions that unknown hackers have taken against Valve and Half-Life 2. I think it is morally reprehensible that someone could justify stealing their work and proceed to threaten them with it! I am a firm anti-piracy supporter and the individual(s) who have done this should be dealt with harshly. Not only has it caused unknown damage to Half-Life 2 (which I am very excited about) and Valve as a company (who I respect greatly), it has, in my opinion, damaged the industry as a whole. What did this hacker think they

security (thus lessening the time they spend on creating games for us the gaming public) they will be less likely to even give us gamers previewing information. Now while I can't say that I liked the way Valve dealt with providing information (or lack thereof) about Half-Life 2, it is their information to provide and we should respect that. It disgusts me that these people can justify doing something like this. I sincerely hope that Valve can overcome this and continue providing us with the high quality software that they have been releasing since way back when Half-Life was released on November 1, 1998.

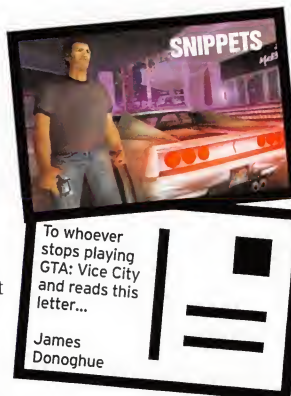
Shae Nagorcka



were doing when they broke into Valves network? It hasn't helped anyone. Now not only will high profile companies like Valve be spending even more money and time on improving

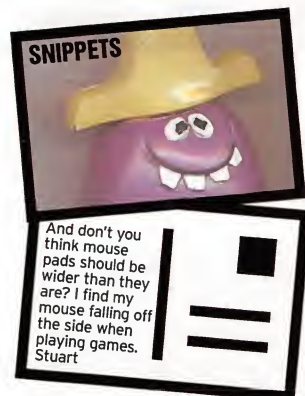
### TURN THEIR NOSES

Unless you have just awoken from a coma, you will know that someone has supposedly stolen two thirds of Vivendi, Valve and Havok's code. However to me I see something not quite right about the whole deal. Valve has never been good at keeping promises. Team Fortress Classic 2 was hyped to be released in 2000 but still shows no signs of life. Counter-Strike: Condition Zero has all but died because of its constant delays and developer switches - it was meant to be released over two year ago. This caused a huge uproar





among gamers and the community. Now Half-Life 2, I don't think there will be a bigger game until Half-Life 3. Just confirming it sends the whole gaming community nuts; setting a release date, exposing videos, interviews, screenshots, and demos sends the fans into a ball of shivering emotional mess.



Originally the game was meant to appear around September, but after two delays it was set back to around Christmas. This alone caused a lot of people to turn their noses; in typical Valve fashion they had underestimated their release times and have had to set it back two months. How much money did they lose? Lots. More to the point, setting back their game four months could be catastrophic, but then again releasing an unpolished game on this magnitude could be even more cataclysmic than a delay. So it was a lose-lose situation; unless they could lay the blame onto someone or something else? An email hack maybe?

You would think the developers of the worlds most anticipated computer game would stop at no extent to protect their software, right? So how exactly does one steal two thirds (that's over 1000 files and 300 folders) through an email malware? Valve would certainly not have its beloved source code just sitting on every computer in their office. You would think they would have it behind numerous state of the art firewalls and encrypted ports so no one could access this information without actually being on the network. Furthermore, it's evident that Gabe Newell deals with a lot of virus and hacker attacks, any sign of 1000 files and folders being copied wouldn't go un-noticed. Then of course comes his statement, his first one being that the game will be delayed at least 4 months,

that's almost half a year, for what? To re-write code? I can't exactly see how they can re-write their physics and AI engine considering it was supposedly perfect. Maybe if a few missions were stolen, but would that really take 16 weeks to re-write mission code?

That brings me to my next point. I dare you to try and find the code, it's not on any P2P applications yet, plus it's been taken of bit torrent where it was originally found. Valve's special email address helpvalve@valvesoftware.com should allow them to find anyone who is publicly releasing it. Furthermore, it's just code, not an application. You will be hard-pressed trying to understand let alone play it. Not only that but it is in fact encrypted with a serial number type security feature that can only be obtained from a Steam client. The only thing that validates the whole code of its legitimacy is the hl2.ico file, which according to the handful of owners confirm is real.

So, if no one can understand, let alone play the stolen code why impose a four-month delay? Maybe the game wasn't finished completely and they needed an extra four months. Simply announcing a delay of this magnitude could lose the company potential millions of dollars in buyers (well maybe, the point is they will lose money). If they got people to feel sorry for Valve and realise that they are not at fault for their usual delay, they might just buy the game.



In conclusion, this is just something that is disturbing and bothers me, although I am most likely completely wrong, it makes one think about to what extent developers will go for good sales, and community trust. Don't get me wrong, I don't condemn Valve at all. I loved Half-Life and am looking forward to Half-Life 2 as much as the person next to you, it just makes me wonder...

Phil Harrison

Rampant unfounded speculation and conspiracy theories. We love it!

## WANTED TO SHARE

In relation to Half-Life 2, I have been searching the net for a definitive release date and came across Amazon.com who have it listed for release on the 1st of December 2003. I just wanted to share that with all the gamers who are waiting in much anticipation. It looks like the listed possible release date of September 30th is a no go.

Steve Tonkli

Thanks for the tip, Steve.

## HL2 VOUCHER INSTEAD

After watching the Half-life 2 previews on the last two PCPP DVDs and reading the article in PCPP#91 'Half-Life 2 really will look better on ATI cards', I started to wonder if HL2 will run on my machine. My machine is up to date except my graphics card which is only a 64mb GeForce2 MX 400. Do I need a new graphic card to run HL2?

I was reading a review of the new Radeon 9800 XT and 9600 XT. Both cards when purchased come with a free copy of Half-Life 2. (Since HL2 isn't out yet you get a HL2 voucher instead). The review said that these cards aren't worth buying if you have something like a Radeon 9700, but for people who still have something like a GeForce 2 or a low powered GeForce 3 you should buy one especially with a free copy of Half-Life 2 included.

In your article, it said that you need a card that supports centroid sampling, something about anti-aliasing and DirectX 9.1. So will a Radeon 9800 XT and 9600 XT support these features and make Half-Life 2 run with awesome graphics and textures on my PC if I buy one of these new cards? Also my system specs are as follow:  
P4 2GHz  
256MB DDR SDRAM  
40MB HARD SIK DRIVE  
16 x DVD

Gordon Freeman, master of disguise?



So, finally, will HL2 run on my PC with a new Radeon 9800 XT or 9600 XT?

Warwick Devery

You will be able to run HL2 on your MX400... at 320 x 240 resolution, with all settings at "Urgh, don't even bother". We'd definitely recommend taking the step up to a true DX9 card such as the 9700 or 9800 if you want to see HL2 the way Valve intended it to be played. And it now appears that the anti-aliasing issues have been fixed for both ATI and NVIDIA cards, but it's yet to be seen what sort of performance hit this will incur.



JENNY  
Class: Wizard  
Race: Gnome

>Happy go lucky Gnome seeks others for encounters in junkyard. Gnome swinging experience preferred:-)

You can find JENNY@Church of Brell, Norrath.



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A unique EverQuest online experience available exclusively on PlayStation®2.  
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# Insight

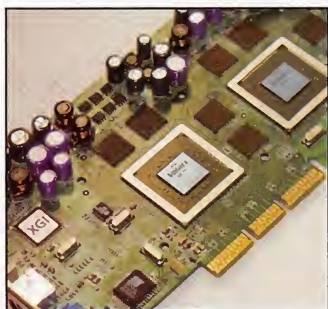
## XGI TAKES ON ATI AND NVIDIA V8 to drive gaming graphics

Bennett Ring

Since the last cough and splutter of 3dfx, the video card wars have been a two horse race – we've got NVIDIA on one side, ATI on the other, and nobody in the middle. While a duopoly is definitely better than a monopoly, it'd be nice to have another company in the mix as we did back in the 3dfx days, as we all know that when there is more competition, the better it is for the consumer. It looks as if there might finally be a company who is going to take on the big boys of the polygon pumping world, and this company is XGI.

XGI actually stands for eXtreme Graphics Innovation, so it should really be EGI, but it's common knowledge that hardware will sell as well as Telstra shares if it doesn't have an X in its title. Maybe that's why XXX movies are so popular with computer geeks? Or maybe not...

XGI was formed as a spin off from SiS, before merging with Trident, and is soon to launch three debut chipsets for the desktop, all of which fall under the Volari product heading. There's the high end V8 chip, which is sure to be a treat with those who like to do endless bog laps of the local nightspot with oonts oonts music rattling their rear view mirror. In



the middle of the pack is the V5, followed at the peasant end by the budget oriented V3.

Being the performance whores that we are, it's obviously the V8 that's got us all hot and bothered, and on paper it looks like a rather meaty card considering that its XGI's first offering. In fact, it's even got a higher fill rate than the



9800 PRO, although this is becoming less relevant as shader-bottlenecked DX9 games are finally starting to hit store shelves. But the feature that sounds the coolest is the ability for this chip to be run in Duo mode, which is just a fancy way of saying you can whack two processors onto the one video card. As a result of this twin processor goodness, XGI claims that the Duo V8 Ultra card is about as fast as a RADEON 9800 or GeForce FX 5900, and with a reported score of around 5,600 in 3DMark03, it's not far off.

We actually saw the card post

this score at the recent Computex 2003 conference, but we did notice a problem that SiS has been accused of in the past – texture compression. While the demo guy giving the presentation swore that the card wasn't using any cheats which could result in lower image quality, we're pretty certain that the textures in the 3DMark03 test looked to be of a lower level of detail than what we've seen on both NVIDIA and ATI cards. Or maybe it was just because our eyes were tired after staring at several hundred booth babes. Regardless, XGI is going to have to be extra

careful about not doing the dirty on its customers, especially considering the recent accusations and counter-accusations that ATI and NVIDIA have flinging towards each other of late.

We should have a review of the XGI V8 Ultra Duo next month, where we'll dig into the technical details of this new kid on the bump mapped block; if it's anywhere near as good as the marketers are suggesting, then ATI and NVIDIA could be in for a bit of a shock. And gamers could be in for faster cards that sell at cheaper prices, which is always a good thing.





# FINAL FANTASY XI

## PS2 Demo Bringing it to PC

Timothy C. Best

There have been a lot of PS2 games to cross to the PC and most have been dodgy ports like Metal Gear Solid 2 and Final Fantasy VII, but with FFXI Square Enix is launching a real assault.

The game is being published by EA and the PC version will feature the first expansion free of charge while the PS2 hard drive, which lands early next year, will come with the game pre-installed.

If you are wondering why you should care about the PS2 version, it's because this is the first game that allows console users and PC users to cross swords in the same MMORPG world.

For PS2 users, working out who has beefy enough system to play is easy, but on the PC side it's a little

more complicated. Even if you have the latest PC hardware you can still have a funky set-up that just doesn't like a game. The requirements printed on the back don't really help and game demos never quite have the same needs as the final product because of new elements and optimisations.

With a PS2 native like Final Fantasy XI you also add in all of those bloated port concerns; that's why Square Enix has combined a demo movie and benchmarking program. It uses actual assets, maps and graphics tricks to see how it all flies on your particular set-up. Why don't all games let you do this?

This might actually be a port that's totally PC.

# GOFORCE

## Nvidia Thinks Big by Looking Small

Timothy C. Best

In a bid to look to the future, Nvidia is trying to sucker us all into a new round of hardware upgrades ... it is planning to bring its brand of graphics cards to mobile devices like phones and handheld computers.

Nvidia set the wheels in motion by acquiring QMedia in August. Combining forces has lead to the GoForce chips which aim to make mobiles devices better at taking pictures and playing games.

According to Nvidia, the flagship GoForce 2150, out performs the Game Boy Advance GPU by a factor of 25, it can process eleven 1.3 megapixel photos per second, is good for about 70 display interfaces (that's a whole bunch of different devices) and consumes a modest amount of battery power.

At the moment Nvidia have only announced Mitac's Mio 8390 as using their chip but past QMedia customers include Mitsubishi, Siemens, Palm, Sharp, Philips Electronics, Dell and Sony so chances are that the GoForce will start hitting the scene en masse.

This is a brilliant move by Nvidia. Sony has just announced plans for a tiny TV tuner chip aimed at phones, Sprint has released a Game Pad Controller for the Samsung A600 and MicroForte has

apparently put \$9 million into wireless middleware products to connect these devices to their Big World technology.

It's a no-brainer that mobile phones are the interactive devices of the immediate future and that they are on a collision course with PC technology. With this move Nvidia is well positioned to help enter new frontiers of games technology.



**MURDOK**  
Class: Shaman  
Race: Troll

>Tetchy Troll seeks  
adventurous type  
for Goblin whipping.  
No time wasters:—(

You can find **MURDOK**@Snotspit River, Norrath.



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# VALVE CRACKED

## Source Code Stolen

Timothy C. Best

After having its source code nabbed, in the highest profile cyber heist in gaming history, Half-Life 2 isn't likely to surface until April.

Valve head honcho and ex-Microsoft employee, Gabe Newell, believes that someone exploited a hole in Outlook to remotely install a keystroke recorder to gain access to Valve systems.

A post on the HalfLife2.net boards by Newell confirmed the rumours that the source code had been compromised with most memorable line being the simple sentiment: "Well, this sucks."

It's unsure whether enough art assets were taken to hash together a version of the game and other developers would be foolish to try steal it, but there's still plenty of bad news for Valve.

There are issues such as giving away leading-edge tricks of the trade, costing Valve money (HL2 now misses the vital Christmas period), handing cheat hackers a blueprint, not to mention putting

off companies who might be interesting in licensing the multimillion dollar engine (as Troika has already done for Vampire: Bloodlines).

Valve will busy in the next few months plugging holes and tweaking code to protect the retail version from attacks stemming from this source.

It will also have ground to make up with its online content delivery service Steam (which comes with anti-piracy and anti-cheating features built in) since a security breach like this can't make people more confident about investing in such a thing.

Valve has been a hardcore gaming darling since Half-Life and the modding tools they released for it but recent Steam developments which could see people paying to play games like CS have got up some people's noses. Newell says both Steam and its corporate site have been the targets of denial of service attacks.

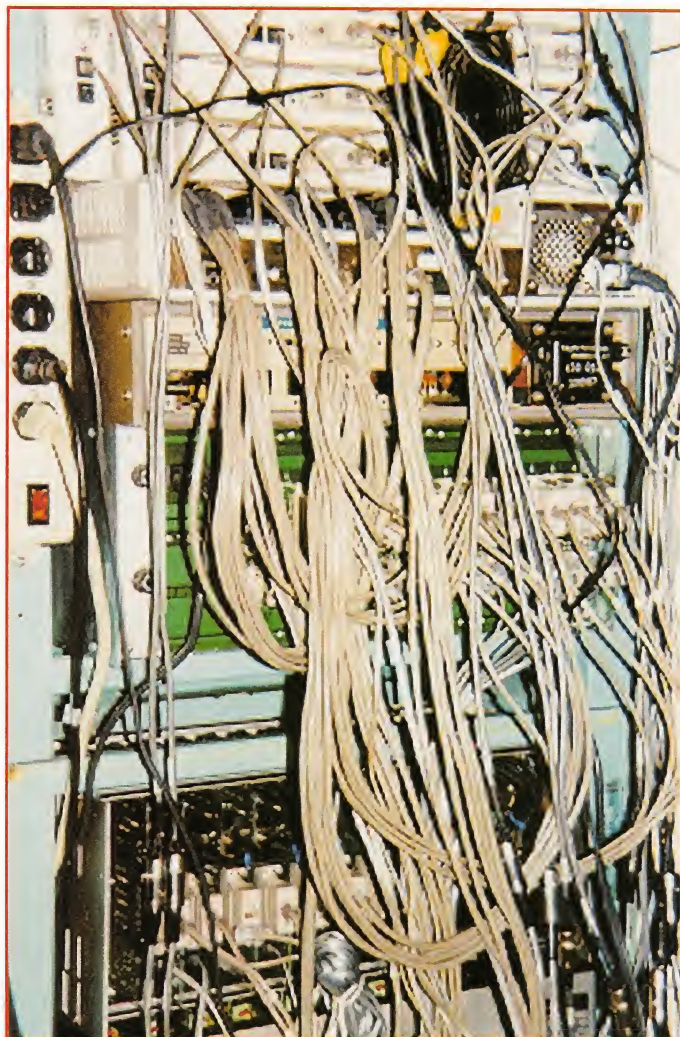
I'm not sure who this all helps,



We probably won't be seeing this in a game for a while

because hardcore fans will lynch anyone looking for the fame, and I'm sure even keen CS gamers would rather have what was

shaping up as the game of 2003, in 2003, rather than have someone stick it to the man.



## LOADS OF DOWNLOAD

### Getting Games Down the Pipe

Timothy C. Best

Looking at all the money Valve's spent on its ambitious online content delivery system, it's obvious that at least one industry heavy-hitter is certain that cutting out the middleman and sending games straight to players is the way of the future. There has been a lot of talk and some limited success with schemes like this in the past, but these ideas seem to be gathering steam, so to speak.

For one, that's the basis of the entire Phantom game system. Secondly, Microsoft has announced that it is adding its games catalogue to Yahoo! Games on Demand. This includes Freelancer, Dungeon Siege, Zoo Tycoon and Age of Mythologies.

Games On Demand uses a broadband connection to stream the games to players for as long as they rent them. Other titles in its

catalogue include Republic of the Revolution, Splinter Cell and Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness. It's all very digital age.

The final big news along these lines, this month, is that you can now download the complete Anarchy Online game plus the two expansions for \$US39.95 (or about \$60) and still get the one month trial period. Online content delivery just makes too much sense for massively multiplayer online games. You need the Internet connection and secure credit card service anyway.

While it's true that games will need shelf space for years to come, moves like these can only be good for gamers ... bringing you less packaging and more game for your buck.





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PlayStation 2



PlayStation 2



PlayStation 2



PlayStation 2



This is just the start of an awesome range of Network Entertainment titles on the way.  
Games subject to availability. Check with your retailer for release dates and final game classification.

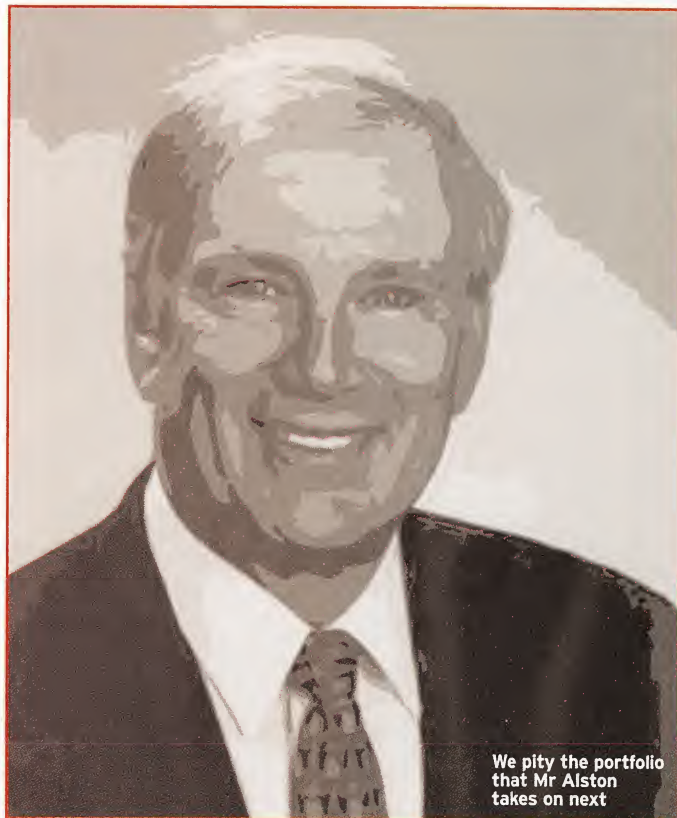
The future of interactive entertainment is here and now anyone can be your next challenger. Go up against real opponents or combine forces in an action-packed, real-time online experience with PlayStation®2 Network Gaming. Get the Network Adaptor, bundled with the Hardware Online Arena game for only \$69.95<sup>RRP</sup> – making it even easier to be a part of the action. You'll also need a broadband internet connection to a cable or ADSL modem to play. For more information on Network Gaming go to [au.playstation.com/ng](http://au.playstation.com/ng)

Real opponents. Infinite possibilities.



PlayStation 2  
NETWORK ENTERTAINMENT





# ALSTON CALLS IT A DAY

## New IT Minister To Mess Things Up

Timothy C. Best

The man once dubbed one of the world's great luddites has been removed from his post as the Australian Communications and IT Minister.

Senator Richard Alston didn't make too many friends, especially amongst early technology adopters by saying that broadband shouldn't be a national priority because it was mainly a platform for pornography and kids playing games. His endorsement of particularly unwieldy Internet content regulation didn't help either. This regulation requires anything that is hosted in Australia 'which deals with issues or contains depictions which require an adult perspective' to be on an age-restricted sites. Try patrolling that!

Alston is planning to retire so the whole lot (including his Arts portfolio) has been handed to ex-Attorney-General Darryl Williams – who has pulled out some fairly scary Big Brother policies of his own – and who doesn't have any documented IT experience.

With Alston in the role for six-and-a-half years, the post is crying for new blood, but since Ministers can only table ideas and it's Cabinet that makes the final calls don't expect much beyond changes in presentation style.

At least we might avoid some "luddite" and "global village idiot" quotes this time around.

# DELTA ONE ZERO

## Is it a game? Is it reality? Are you a nut job?

Bennett Ring

Ever wanted to be a secret agent, but the fact that you're as blind as a bat, deaf as a doorknob and dumber than a box of nails holds you back from joining ASIO? Now's your chance to prove that you could have been a super spy, with Delta One Zero, a game that blurs the lines between the virtual and the real world.

Kicking off on the 24th of November, DOZ uses a combination of SMS messaging, voice mail, email, live events and web based puzzles to weave a web of conspiracy around those who register for the game. As a result, you'll need an SMS compatible phone, email access and a Net connection to play the game, but if you didn't already figure that out, chances are you're not going to do too well in this cryptic exercise in puzzle solving.

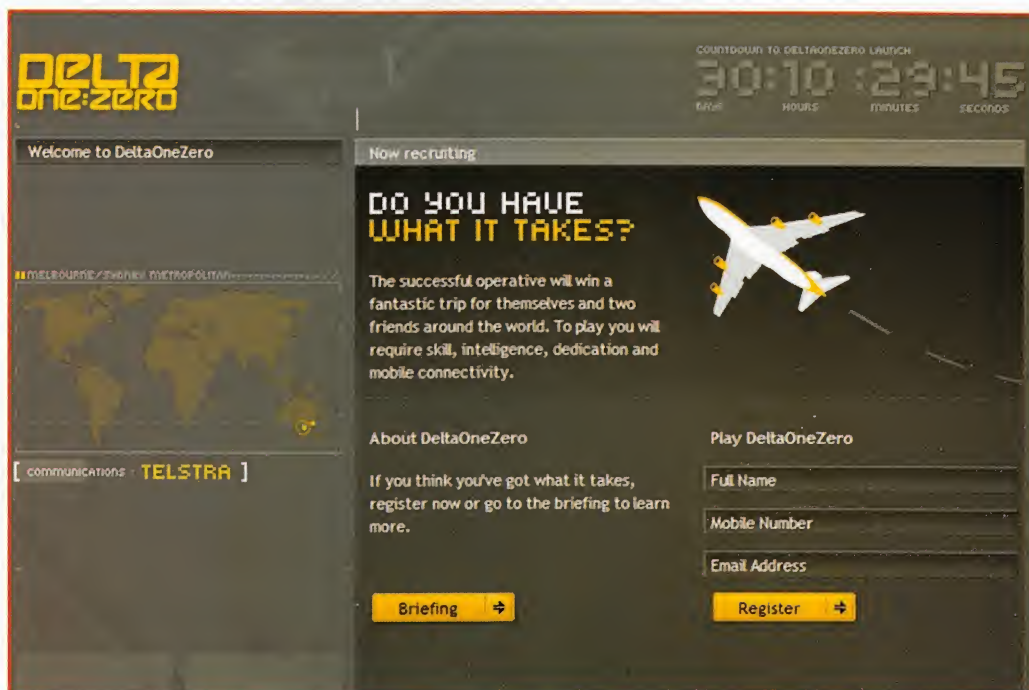
Like any good conspiracy, we haven't got much of a clue what it's all about, other than the fact that it involves some kind of global anti-terrorism theme. The game is being sponsored by Telstra, so it's totally free to enter, and after a month of play the winner will be declared, who will be sent on a round the world trip with two mates.

We're rather excited about this game, and not just due to the

awesome prizes on offer, but are a little worried that some might take things a tad too seriously, and start bugging their relative's phones and booby trapping their place of residence. Unfortunately it's only

open to those in the metropolitan areas of Melbourne and Sydney, due to some of the clues being located in places you'll need to visit. To register, head over to [www.deltaonezero.com](http://www.deltaonezero.com) and prepare

to enter a world where you won't quite know what is real, and what is another clue in the unfolding mystery around you.





# Halo Invades PC



## HALO®

Join the battle. Live the epic adventure yourself. Unlock the secrets of Halo to save mankind from the ruthless Covenant swarms. Take the fight online in customisable head-to-head multiplayer competitions against up to 15 rival Master Chiefs. Break open a redesigned arsenal complete with the wicked new fuel rod gun. Then go mobile in the redeveloped Rocket Warthog and Banshee. This is Halo evolved.



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gearbox  
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game studios

[www.microsoft.com/Games/Halo](http://www.microsoft.com/Games/Halo)





# Napoleonic Total War

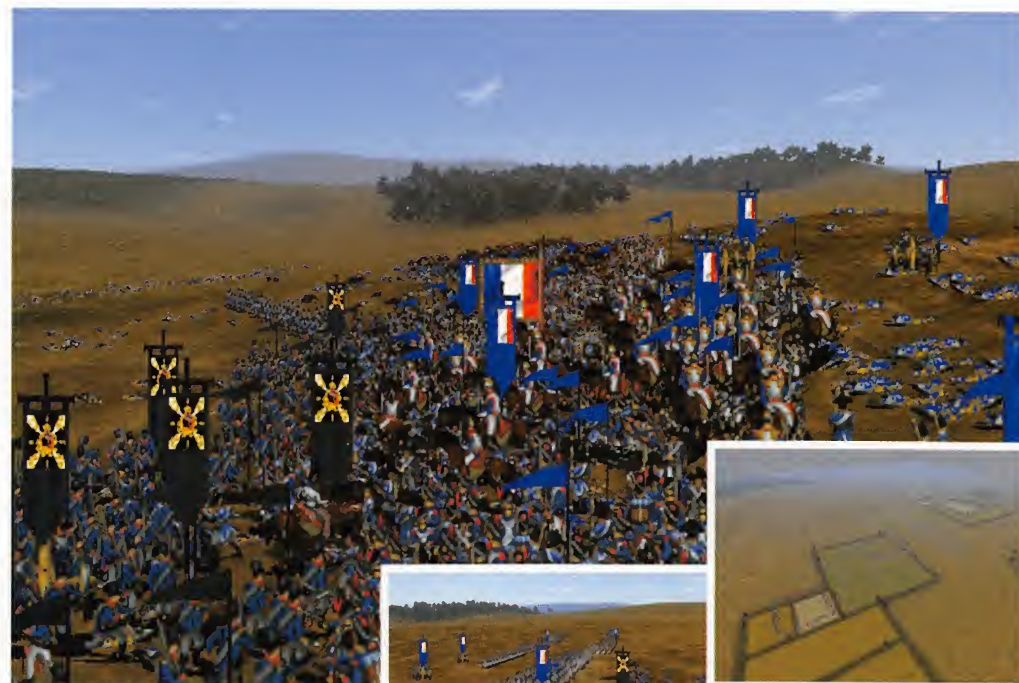
For: Medieval Total War ■ Version: 1.03 ■ Size: 44MB ■ Rating: 5/5 ■ URL: [www.thelordz.co.uk](http://www.thelordz.co.uk)

**R**ather than review Napoleonic Total War at it's current stage of development, we've decided to save that pleasure for when the final version of the mod is available. Instead we spoke to the creators of the mod, the self proclaimed Lords, to hear about their plans first-hand.

## A word with THE LORDS

### PCPP: What inspired the team to start creating Napoleonic Total War?

The Lords: Well the mod was the original concept of Damien (Lord Krazy) and Frank (Lord Black Adder). We had worked on previous tests with musket and bayonet with the idea of making mods for the musket era. We wanted to see a Napoleonic game from Creative Assembly, but as Rome had been announced to be the next game, we decided to try make our own NTW (Napoleonic Total War) for a laugh. We were very interested in progressing the game in a new direction, to see if the MTW (Medieval: Total War) engine could support a NTW mod anyway. We knew it would be hard or near impossible, but we figured that was no excuse. A basic unit version was made for a battle only mod and it became quite popular. We were surprised by the amount of people that downloaded it and responded with praise and many offering to help progress the mod. Most of them were Napoleonic freaks and the rest were just overmedicated I presume, so with the help of the new Lords - many of whom were regulars at totalwar.org forums where the mod was first



announced and got noticed - we progressed to make the campaign demo we have at present. The campaign, just like the unit mod before it, is a demo of what we are trying to achieve. This mod has taken a lot of time and energy to get to this stage so you can imagine it will take a bit more to bring it to a more finished product. This is only the beginning really.

### PCPP: How easy was it working with the Total War engine?

The Lords: Well, easy is not a word I would use in our case, for more than one reason, A) the fact we are all amateurs with no experience and no resources, we find it hard to work

full stop and B) it just hard to work with an engine that is like Fort Knox with a padlock on it. It's a bit like English law, you can't do this, you can't do that, etc.

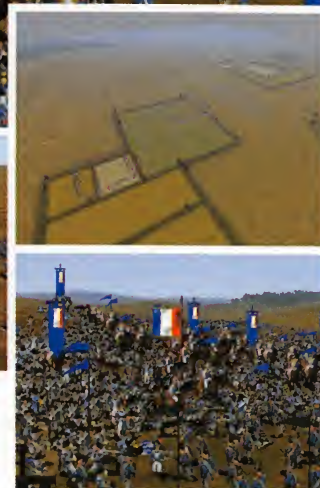
The engine is pretty much closed to modders; we can only change the appearance plus cheat and deceive using black magic and propaganda, more so than programming. The file structure is not too bad when you get used to it, but it's a big project making a full conversion, even on the cheap. The amount of manual entries needed to make a campaign file alone is enough to drive a person mad. The teamwork on different parts of the mod was needed, as it is too big structure wise and entry wise for one person to cope with.

### PCPP: Aside from the obvious change of setting, what other changes will players see in the mod?

The Lords: Apart from the different looking units, new nations to play etc, work is in progress to make the battles more accurate to the time period. The AI at present does not use the best tactics for the units available to them. In future versions of the mod there will be different formations available to use in battles, i.e. the Cavalry Square.

### PCPP: Any plans for more historical conversions in the future (I'd love to see a War of Independence or American Civil War mod)?

The Lords: Well, we are planning on



doing a mod for both. Yet again, units will be made first for battles and the campaigns will follow.

### PCPP: We understand that both Activision and Creative Assembly are firmly behind the mod, what are they doing to help you?

The Lords: Basically they said they were happy that we were doing the mod and wouldn't shut it down. They plugged it a bit on the official Total War site, but no real support was given regarding editing the engine. They have provided a lot of info on what can and can't be done regarding making campaigns, but as it seems the AI stuff is hardcoded and can't be changed without rewriting it, there is not a lot they can do really.

### PCPP: Any advice for budding modders?

The Lords: Start young or get the divorce first. Contact other modders and ask them for advice. They should be able to point you in the right direction, regarding links for info and tools. Reading and partaking in the forums related to the game is always a good idea also. I find determination and a desire to achieve helps and this can be spurred on by setting modest targets at first. Modding as part of a community has helped me for sure.

## Who Are The Lords?

### LORD HAL

**Name:** Helmut Eiler  
**Location:** Germany

### LORD de Marseilles.

**Name:** Thibault Autheman.  
**Location:** England.

### LORD Shand.

**Name:** Simon Hand.  
**Location:** Australia.

### LORD of Storms.

**Name:** Kevin Hagemann.  
**Location:** USA.

### LORD Le Bob.

**Name:** Stephan Denardi.  
**Location:** USA.

### LORD Cuirassier 66

**Name:** Sivakumar. A. K  
**Location:** USA.

### LORD Uxbridge

**Name:** Oliver Howard  
**Location:** England

### LORD Defrel

**Name:** Matthew Ginnever  
**Location:** England

### LORD DEMORAY

**Name:** Peter Wills  
**Location:** Scotland

### LORD Sora

**Name:** Douglas Spencer  
**Location:** England

### LORD Bloodygore

**Name:** Claudio Romero  
**Location:** USA

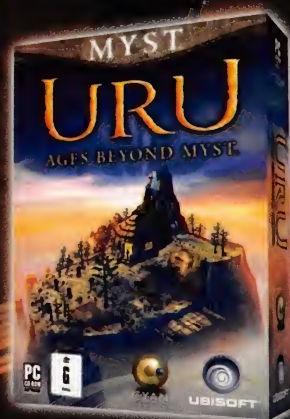


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# GARAGE GAMES

Into the unknown with George Soropos

## RUBIES OF EVENTIDE

Developer: **Cyber Warrior Inc.** Genre: **MMORPG** URL: [www.rubiesofeventide.com/](http://www.rubiesofeventide.com/)



**M**assively multiplayer online roleplaying is the genre for this month's Garage Game, a nine year labour of love now known as Rubies of Eventide. Rubies' has been live for only six months now but has gone through a long and gradual development path, clocking up a lot of beta hours in the process. Developers Cyber Warrior are facing some pretty stiff competition from titles like Everquest and Dark Age of Camelot in this genre and considering the comparative lack of resources that they have to work with, Rubies stands up quite well due to the design of the game and its innovative features.

The game has a very open character design system allowing you to develop any kind of avatar you like, depending on how you assign your earned skill points. There is a crafting system in place, with more features still to come, an extensive range of magic abilities for the theumaturgically inclined, and a very active guild community. The overall size of the game is still quite modest, which has both good and bad points. The smallish community, compared to say Everquest, gives the game a more homely feel and the atmosphere is friendlier and more intimate. The size of the community and the philosophy of the developers also allows an unprecedented level of player input into the design of future expansions and additions, which come in smaller, but much more numerous downloads than any other MMORPG we've played.

Rubies of Eventide's servers are based in New Jersey in the U.S. but don't be put off by the distance. After extensive play testing we never encountered any lag problems that were worse than that suffered by even the U.S. customers and the game works very well in that regard. There are

occasional server crashes, but because of the design of the game you will never lose anything as a result and they really are only a minor annoyance.

We were fortunate enough to pin down Julia Howe long enough to answer a few questions, Julia along with father Mark Howe form the core development team behind Rubies.

### Developer Dialogue

**Rubies of Eventide aims to recreate the pen and paper experience as closely as possible, is that because you think that other MMORPGs don't do this well enough?**

Julia Howe: Absolutely. This is one area most MMORPG's are sorely stunted. Lack of genuine character customisation and freedom of choice has personally driven me to dump some games. Something bad happened when MUDs moved into the graphical realm... Way too much emphasis seems to have been placed on graphics and less into the overall game and storyline. So we have strived to achieve some kind of cross-section here in Rubies, with the best aspects of MUDs, p&p and computer games.

**The updates have been coming out quite quickly, how much player input goes into deciding what will be in the updates?**

JH: Player input matters a lot. All of us (devs) read the message boards regularly and we do take customer feedback in public and in private to heart. Many of our features have been suggested by avid gamers in the past and canonised through suggestions from new players. So we assess what we need to do for the next patch and try to include some popularly discussed ideas as a nice surprise. We really do take pride in our player-developer



channel of communication and I hope it continues to be this focused and genuine even as our player base grows.

**Where do most of your players come from, or are they evenly scattered around globe?**

JH: Wow. They're all over the place. We used to be pretty evenly split 50% USA and 50% European although recently its looking more like 70% USA and 30% Overseas (Europe and Asia). Most of our guilds, fan sites, and diehards (in no particular order) seem to yield from Canada, England, France, The Czech Republic, Germany, USA, and Australia.

**What are your all-time favourite games?**

JH: Hmm. What platform are you talking about here.. =/ Chronotrigger, Chronocross, Kings Quest series, Starcraft, Sims, Dragon Quest, Bust-a-Move, Dink Smallwood, Legend of the Red Dragon, Tradewars2002 (\*laugh\*), Warcraft3, Leisure Suit Larry (\*hide\*), Age of Empires 2, and last but not least Rubies.

**If you like the sound of this month's garage game, visit the Rubies homepage (see URL above) and download the free trial version!**





This is where  
I got further with Lara  
than anyone else.

**TOMB  
RAIDER**  
*Starring Lara Croft*



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ARENA**



Tomb Raider™ now on N-Gage™. Join Lara Croft in this new wireless multiplayer 3D-action adventure. Experience the revolution in online mobile gaming with N-Gage Arena. Online features: Shadow Gaming, Walkthroughs, Tips & Hints, Director's Cut. [n-gage.com](http://n-gage.com)

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**eidos**

**core  
design**

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Mike Colvard

## 5 COPIES OF BROKEN SWORD THE SLEEPING DRAGON

Thanks to the delightful diva-esque Estelle at THQ, we have five copies of the third in the Broken Sword trilogy to give away. The Sleeping Dragon follows the fine tradition of exemplary story-telling and fiendish puzzling that developer Revolution has always been known for. To win, answer this question on the back of an envelope:

**Q. What's the name of George Stobbart's cute French girlfriend?**

Broken Sword Comp  
PC PowerPlay  
78 Renwick St  
Redfern NSW 2016



WIN!

THE BORINGLY NAMED

# COMPETITION PAGE!

## WINNERS!

### PCPP#92 EMPIRES

Tristan Zerner, SA  
Shane Headley, QLD  
Jackson Jefferson, VIC  
Jamie McGraw, QLD

### PCPP#92 JEDI ACADEMY

Liam Flynn, VIC  
Glenn Morris, QLD  
Jonathan Dodd, WA

### PCPP#92 SIMPLY WIRELESS

G Brittain QLD (1st prize)  
Jono Boswell ACT

### PCPP#92 PHILIPS 19"

Jason Allen WA

### PCPP#90 PHILIPS 17"

Daniel Jones VIC

### PCPP#88 PHILIPS 15"

J Cardona VIC

## LOSERS!

There are no losers in life. Only those who don't dare to dream.

WIN!

## 10 COPIES OF KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC



Thanks to Electronic Arts, we have a tantalizing ten copies of the best Star Wars game in years, Knights of the Old Republic, to give away. From the creators of the classic Baldur's Gate series, KOTOR is already a smash hit on Xbox and is bound to be even better on PC when released in only a few weeks time.

To win, answer this question on the back of an envelope:

**Q. When playing KOTOR, will you join the light or the dark side? Why?**

KOTOR Comp  
PC PowerPlay  
78 Renwick St  
Redfern NSW 2016





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# HOTWARE

All the bits that we cram in at the last moment with Anthony Fordham

## SAMSUNG DVD-L200

Price: \$1500 Distributor: Samsung Contact: [www.samsung.com](http://www.samsung.com)

Why does DVD kick VHS's butt? It's not picture quality - sure it's better, but hugely better than a new 6 head VCR? No, DVD's real advantage is portability. Take a look at this swanky 10" portable player from Samsung as a prime example. Far more energy efficient than a laptop with a

DVD player, the L200 still includes all the usual sound processing and outputs that a good quality set top player boasts. Dolby this, DTS that, optical in and out the other. Plus you can take it on long bus trips and make your travelling companions squirm with jealousy. Ten inch screen. Yeah mama.



## COOLERMMASTER ALLOY KEYBOARD Q

Price: \$69 Distributor: PC Case Gear Contact: [www.pccasegear.com](http://www.pccasegear.com)

It seems all the hard core case manufacturers are finally sitting up and taking notice of the fact that now we have beautiful shiny aluminium cases, we need accessories to go with them. The Alloy Keyboard Q (Q for quiet? Q for quixotic? Who knows) is one such accessory, with a shiny shiny finish and low-rise laptop style keys for, as CoolerMaster puts it, "long hour business usage." It has all your standard USB-type connectors as well as the mighty Windows key, although some may find it a tad cramped since it doesn't position the cursor keys in the usual place. Still, small price to pay for something that matches your case, right?



## AIBO MKIII ERS-7

Price: US\$1599 Distributor: Sony Contact: [www.aibo.com](http://www.aibo.com)

So your AIBO is getting a little long in the tooth huh? He doesn't chase his pink ball as enthusiastically as he used too, he grinds and whirrs when sitting up and all the pictures from his nosecam turn out blurry. It's time to upgrade. Interestingly enough, after all the brouhaha about AIBO 2 (the ERS-200) being "neither a cat nor a dog" but in fact some kind of robotic lion cub, AIBO 3 (ERS-7) has returned firmly to his doggy roots. New enhancements include better tactile sensors, more fluid leg servos, and of course wireless



connectivity. The price tag has also dropped somewhat, although this has more to do with the strengthening Aussie dollar than any philanthropy on Sony's part. Most Expensive Frivolous Toy Ever is not a crown the electronics giant is keen to give up.



## NOKIA 3300 MP3 PHONE

Price: \$505 Distributor: Nokia Contact: [www.nokia.com.au](http://www.nokia.com.au)

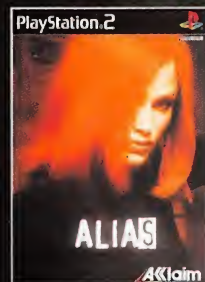
What's that? You're perversely loyal to your GBA SP but you want to be seen carrying something as cool as the N-Gage? Why not try the Nokia 3300, a sort of N-Gage light, combining the slightly ridiculous form factor (Is that a taco pressed to the side of your

head or are you just booking movie tickets?) with a more normal phone. That said, the 3300 does have MP3 functionality and can act as a voice recorder and of course includes the FM receiver now de-rigueur on all phones that don't have cameras. It may look like the older, clunkier GBA with a smaller screen and no games, but it's still cool damnit.





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PlayStation.2



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# CINEMAWARE

For when you want to  
watch instead of play...

## The Matrix : Reloaded

Distributor: Roadshow Classification: M15+



It is a great movie? Well no. Is it a good movie? Well that may depend on which way the wind is blowing, whether you're wearing black/green underwear or if you're a leet speech expert. The real question is does it entertain and for a majority of people the twists and turns, fight scenes and philosophies, are enough to ensure they will enjoy the ride, at least, while they are on it. Minus Morpheus' incessant ranting and some unnecessary minor characters, the vision of hundreds of scantily dressed, mud infested youths is the hardest image to detach from the most influential sci-fi series since Alien. Not surprisingly the cover holds a long list of extras. However possibly due to marketing possibilities for all 3 films it lacks the standard extras like an audio

commentary. Instead the list reads like a self-promotion. Extras such as "The Matrix Unfolds," a five-minute look at the influence of "The Matrix" across movies, games, anime, and the Internet give the impression of an infomercial. Then, there's "Get Me an Exit," nine minutes on the commercial advertising inspired by "The Matrix," like the Samsung phone used in the movie; followed by "Enter the Matrix," on the making of the video game, which we have all seen before. Most disappointing is that most of the extras have been screened on TV in the lead up to the movie release. However the break down of the ultimate car chase which destroyed around 800 cars and "The MTV Movie Awards Reloaded," are worth a viewing.

## Indiana Jones, The Adventures of: DVD box set

Distributor: Paramount Classification: MA15+



I have a loosely based theory, mostly on stupidity, that the success of this series can be pin pointed down to one aspect of a rather awe inspiring production. The theme tune. Even before the discs have been ripe from the pre-shrunk untearable plastic I have launched into a rendition not recognisable by any of my flatmates of the memorable theme. Others might point out that the weight of film giants such as Spielberg, Ford and Lucas might have something to do with it but after watching the myriad of extras I am convinced I am on the right track. This digitally remastered box set has been a long time in coming, with Raiders released in 1981, Temple in 1984 and The Last Crusade completed fourteen years ago (1989). Yet this box set is one of the most anticipated of the

year, largely due to the new footage recorded for its release. Newly produced documentaries exploring the making of these memorable films, including brand-new interviews with the cast and crew (including Spielberg, Ford and Lucas), will ensure this box set will see healthy sales well over the Christmas/New Year period. Featurettes galore also stack the weight in favour of making the purchase. But if you are still struggling over whether or not this is the DVD for you just remember that no matter what you think of the films this box set will be the ultimate purchase because Lucas comes across as even more of a wanker than anyone thought possible.

## The Prime Gig

Distributor: Warner Classification: M15+



Telemarketing is not sexy! So while the script writers were thinking "Sex, Greed and Betrayal", I had visions of pimple-faced kids saving their money for next weekend's drinking spree. Sadly, the story isn't that interesting. The Prime Gig is a midday movie that most wouldn't watch if Springer was on another channel. While we sit

anticipating a plot, the movie takes us through the list of characters each more boring than the next. When we finally get around to Vince Vaughn's character most of us would sigh with relief, but sadly this is the one film I'm sure he leaves off his resume.

## The Office: Series 2

Distributor: Roadshow Classification: M15+

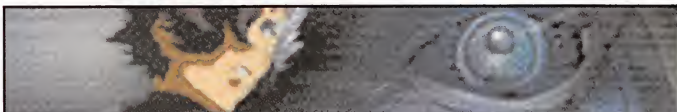


The nine to five grind of coffee consumption and wishing the cheap suit slouched precariously in the next seat would catch a deadly unnamed disease never to return to his post is not something anyone aspires to. So, for all those that wound up facing the daily glare of a blank computer screen, The

Office is the ultimate release. This "on-site docu-soap" or spoof of "reality TV" holds up a mirror to the uncomfortable truths of the office environment. The Office is like a Dilbert strip given the time to grow and mature into a funny and sharp satire. Great after another day of working with absolute half-wits!

## Argentosoma: Vol. 1

Distributor: AV Channel Classification: PG



Soma is the Greek word for body as well as a term used by alchemists for a syrup with the power to make us live forever. So when Takuto Kaneshiro's life is taken from him, Ryu Soma is born. Argentosoma is the latest in a long line of "Big Bad Secret Military Organisation versus Bigger Badder Giant Aliens" anime, but although

clichéd still has enough twists in the formula to be entertaining. A great introduction for the anime ignoramus, the storyline has the feel of an update on Mary Shelley's monster story. For the anime fan, Argentosoma makes a nice follow on from Gasaraki with similar feel and tones.

## hack//sign Ver 01: LOGIN

Distributor: AV Channel Classification: PG



There is no country comparable to Japan and there is no country except Japan that could foster an idea like .hack (or dot hack//Sign). Keeping in mind that marketing is a major commodity these days, cross technologies are sprouting changes in gaming and anime worlds. .hack is not just an anime series but no less than five PS2 games in Japan. While Pokemon or Yu-Gi-Oh target the

younger audience, .hack is crafted around ideas from writers in the cyberpunk and fantasy genres. Centring around a massively multiplayer game called The World, the main character Tsukasa wakes up with no clear memory of who he really is. Although a little light to begin with, the storyline has now developed into an intriguing find. Worth a look!



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OUT TO PLAY Timothy C. Best

# Artificial Intelligence



**I**'m not going to say that the CIA always lives up to the "I" in its name. Look at the recent leaked info or the fact that during the late 90s and the beginning of this century, it figured that the Middle East wasn't a channel worth watching.

Beyond that, getting Alias's Jennifer Garner to act as a recruitment poster girl is like getting Adam Sandler to promote the professional golf, education, gridiron, adoption or the church.

On the other hand, the game (a.k.a. Computer Training Aid) that it is having developed seems to demonstrate a clue or two.

The game will cast players, I mean students, as members of a terrorist cell, financiers of terror or analysts trying to stop them. Best of all, it will be totally multiplayer.

Now you'd think that the American Army's forays into our territory would have laid some ground work wouldn't you? Back in '99 it commissioned a game to help them practice joint operations, which came out commercially as Real War. Now that hardly set the world on fire (that we know of), but since then it has graduated on having Pandemic work on Full Spectrum Warrior, which is looking hardcore. It's all about squad-based tactics and showing upcoming squad leaders what works and what kills, gives them a better idea about where their troops should be, how they should move, what threats they should respond to –

adds the reason why – and does it all without wasting precious bullets.

Of course, the Army also has its \$8 million dollar recruiting tool, the American Army game and it's supposedly working on a RPG, which focuses on the more day-to-day life of a soldier, where you start as recruit and climb up through the ranks, all in the name of giving potential applicants a feel for what military life is like between hot zones. You know the army is serious about this stuff, because God knows it doesn't have a sense of humour.

## Serious Business

Even with all of this precedent, it seems that some people can't fathom a key element of National Security turning to something as obviously frivolous as computer games.

The Washington Times managed to dig up an ex-Congressman who now heads a civil liberties group to slam the idea. Predictably he said that the CIA should be identifying terrorists and not playing games. He also added that if it weren't so serious the situation would be comical.

The President of Citizens Against Government Waste also leapt in to say that the government should strongly urge the CIA to reconsider funding projects like this.

He calls it groping for ideas.

I call them Luddite poo-poo heads, but the CIA spokesperson had a better

response, defending the move by explaining that games are great for imparting information and can lead to innovative problem solving that involves thinking outside of the box.

Any avid gamer will know that the CIA guy nailed it on both counts. Think of how much multiplayer games need to be patched and re-balanced because crafty players find loop-holes in the rules or exploits that they can push for all they are worth.

If you are talking about imparting information, imagine how hard it would be to make people memorise seven building layouts thrust into their hands on pieces of paper. Now, think of how many deathmatch levels are burned into the heads of gamers across the globe.

## Reality Cliff Notes

Imagine how hard it would be to keep track of the specifics of dozens of countries including terrain, resources, official and unofficial alliances, weapons technology, access points, strategic importance and so on.

Once you have all of that in your head you also have to keep track of the various different cells and organisations operating in each one. The world's a bit complex for that 'enemy of my enemy' thing to hold too much water – there are just too many fanatical ideologies,

ancient feuds, politics and religions to keep up with.

Now, there are certainly brilliant analysts that keep all of this in their heads and can think through various scenarios but how much easier would it be to learn if it's all in a game running in front of you?

The game becomes an interactive world map, showing shifting alliances, funding and resourcing. As the CIA players battle it out they will pretty quickly discover where the no-go zones are, who will shoot first and burn Bush effigies later, and who you have to impress to get what. It gives you a contextualised framework complete with cheat notes.

What's more, unlike in a regular game, if you come up with something that isn't in the game, like sponsoring another U2 mega-tour and hiding secret transmissions on the big screens and smuggling weapons in the amps – or something considerably more sane – you can always have the possibilities flagged in real-life and then hacked into the game. If it's all about thinking outside the box, something like this could be just the thing.

There's also the added bonus that these things are immersive. When many Americans have difficulty believing that the world at large sees it more like Lex Luthor than Superman, imagine how hard it would be for them to 'pretend' to be a terrorist. At least with a game you could feel your options shutting down as your ridiculously wealthy enemy influences your world from across oceans, spends billions on new security, funnels money to your ancient foes and possesses the most expensive and high-tech warmachine in the world.

What do you have left? How can you strike this giant? There's your game right there.

## So What?

Why am I so impressed by this CIA game that's not even made and that will probably have all of the gameplay of an ice bucket? It's the idea behind it all.

Here's where I normally wax lyrical about 'heralding a new age of gaming where the playing is as creative as the game design' then smoothly slide into mumbo jumbo about 'recognising the true potential of an interactive medium' – but really, I just like the idea of geeks avenging wedgies with suicide missions.

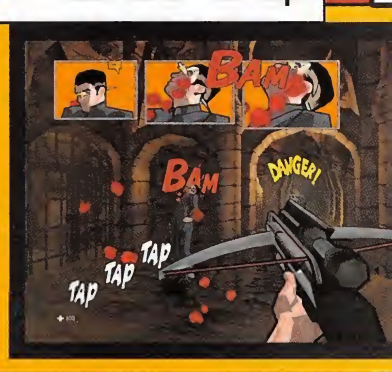
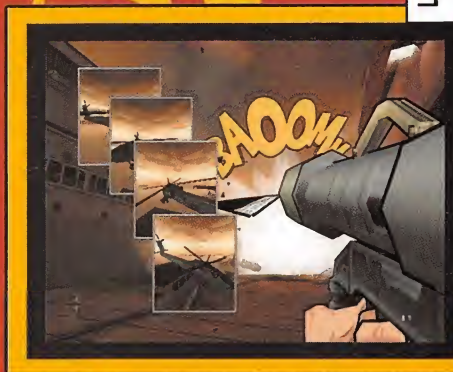


# XIII

they know more about you than you do.

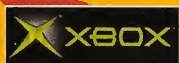


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PlayStation 2



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TECH TALK: Stuart Calvin

# Is it Hammer time?

**T**he AMD Athlon XP processor was announced on the 9th of October 2001 and introduced the 1800+, 1700+, 1600+ and 1500+ versions. It's now more than two years later...can we expect the Barton to be available in two years time? I - don't - think - so, maybe, if, perhaps, hmm. Think on that. With the recent release of the eagerly awaited Athlon 64 series I took another quick peek at AMD's Processor Road Map. This "Opteron" and "64" thing could get confusing. Before we jump onto the bandwagon perhaps it's timely to build a street-wise picture for us punters. Socket-462 has been around for a long time and with the launch of the *Hammer* Athlon 64 series, Socket 462 days are therefore numbered. The "normal" Athlon 64 is based on a new Socket-754, and the Athlon 64 FX has to be plugged into a Socket-940. The different pin count of the *Hammer* CPUs is due to a dual-channel memory interface as well as several HyperTransport ports. The standard Athlon 64 only has one single-channel memory interface and one HyperTransport port. Ugh! New CPUs, new motherboards.

After a search around Australian retailer websites the situation is this: Athlon 64 FX-51 CPUs are filtering onto the street at near \$1400 dollars. The normal Athlon 64 can be had for between \$700 and \$850. The venerable Athlon XP 1800+ is around \$100. Why do I mention the 1800+ specifically? Because I doubt you'll find a retail Athlon XP 1500+, 1600+ or 1700+ processor for Christmas. The 1500+ was only ever fabricated with a *Palomino* core (1.75V/90/266MHz) so don't consider this a worthwhile upgrade from a *Duron* or a *Thunderbird*. The 1600+ was fabricated as a *Palomino* and a *Thoroughbred-B* (1.60V/90/266MHz), it was never in the original TBred-A lineup. Presumably, once the bugs were ironed out of the excessively hot TBred-As, a 1600+ B-model was seen as, and reintroduced as, a good seller. If you've only got pocket money and can find a 1600+ DUT3C then go for it. The 1700+ was found in all three forms: *Palomino*, *TBred-A* and *TBred-B* (1.50V/90/266MHz). I could only find one retailer with this processor, so if you do find one, make sure that it's a DLT3C TBred-B model. The 1800+ was similarly fabricated in three tranches and is fast disappearing from the shelves - again, grab the DLT3C model. The



1900+ was not sold on a TBred-B core so give it a miss completely even though it runs at only 1.50V. The 2000+ is also found as *Palomino*/TBred-A/TBred-B variants. In fact it's not until you get to 2200+ that no mistake can be made - they're all TBred-Bs - even then, you're after the 1.60V DUV3C variant. At under \$130, the 2200+ is a bargain but for less than \$20 more, you can be pulling 2000MHz with a 2400+. If you're motherboard can only run a 133MHz FSB and you want to upgrade, then start praying for a DKV3C 2600+ to fall from the lap of the gods because I can only find 333MHz versions and you may well be stuck at 2400+ or 2000MHz. Only got 333MHz? You can economically top-out with a 2800+/333MHz TBred-B or a 3000+/333MHz Barton if you watch prices from now. Got 400MHz to burn? Just bought yourself a 333/400MHz FSB AMD board? At \$750, do you buy a 3200+ Barton or a *Hammer* Athlon 64? How many more Bartons can we reasonably expect to see? Well, I mean, do you ignore the latest proven 32-bit processors or should you jump over to the Athlon 64/FX? Mmm, 64-bit computing.

Decisions, decisions...

The forging summary basically accords with AMD's Processor Road Map. What's a frickin' Road Map?! It's AMD's version of what's happening behind you, in front of you and down the track a bit; to the end of 2004, in fact, as far as we publicly know. In short, production of the 0.13µ process Athlon *Thoroughbred* XP/MP processor stopped some time in the first half of this year and was replaced by the 0.13µ Athlon 512KB L2 cache *Barton*, XP/MP processor. Yep, the Athlon as we know it, is going, going and will be gone as soon as shelf stocks are exhausted. Just try finding some of the early desirable *Thoroughbreds* and this is where the 3000+ is headed (last of the 333MHz FSB processors). I can imagine that a flurry of CPU upgrades are starting right now and will continue through Christmas and New Year. This has implications: trade up to a 400MHz FSB Barton or leap up to Athlon 64-bit computing? At current *Hammer* prices, most of us can't begin to even comprehend it, so it'll pay to re-evaluate your upgrade paths and ideas. Die costs (basically the major component of production costs) for

AMD have to come down. Industry experts agree that this can only occur with a shift to a 0.09µ (micron) process and *Clawhammer* is planned to appear as a 0.09µ process *San Diego* in early to mid 2004 - same thing, different process. Depending on how well we get to know and admire the Athlon 64/FX depends on its price and scaling. End of year 'Hammer' sales will be critical to how price points are positioned in the coming new year. The Barton should push out to the end of 2004, maybe early 2005 if we're lucky. By lucky, I mean how well the Athlon 64/FX sells. If *Hammer* uptake is not strong over the next 6 months then I'd expect the Barton core to remain as a cash-cow for AMD and its life thus prolonged - good for us gamers at least. Our Socket-A boards won't be obsolete overnight.

What are the other differences between the old (K7) and the new processors (K8)? We'll hear a lot more of this but I'd like to highlight the FSB issue. You see there's no Front Side Bus. In the Athlon 64 FX processor, the FSB has been replaced by a dedicated memory bus and a HyperTransport link. The serial Hyper Transport links connect the CPU to external chips such as the South Bridge, AGP controller or another CPU and initially operates at 1600MHz. More importantly, what are the differences between the Athlon 64 and the Athlon 64 FX processors? The Athlon 64 FX offers more performance, larger cache memory and a 128-bit memory interface over the normal 64-bit. It's designed to offer extra performance on digital content creation and importantly gaming applications - w00t. With the Athlon 64 FX-51, AMD has abandoned their model number system in favour of a numerical series classification similar to the Opteron (which starts at 240). For example, the first Athlon 64 FX is the series 51 CPU, running at 2.2GHz. The number 51 was chosen arbitrarily and indicates nothing about its performance relative to any chip other than the Athlon 64 FX. The next CPU due out in 2004 will be the Athlon 64 FX-53, and you are all expected to know is that 53 is faster than 51. Gee, that's simple, why didn't I think of it? The Athlon 64 processor is not carved out of living ivory by the hand of god - yet. Take your time to upgrade but do it sooner rather than later for another few years of economical gaming g00dness.



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## THE GUERRILLA GAMER

# Doing a Boonie

**T**he story you're about to hear is essentially true, only some of the facts have been changed to protect the innocent. Like something of a latter-day Deep Throat (or maybe Masked Magician) I'm about to uncover some secrets that may put my life at risk - the games journalistic fraternity isn't the most forgiving when it comes to divulging privileged information. Oh, don't get me wrong, we're fine with giving out closely guarded industry secrets for the world to know but ours are closely guarded. Hell hath no fury like a sexually frustrated geek who has just been stripped of his last vestiges of professional dignity.

Now this may come as a bit of a shock to you but games journalists as a whole are not the responsible and caring individuals that our writing may have lead you to believe - we are, by and large, base and disgusting creatures. What has inspired this fit of brutal honesty I hear you ask? Seeing one of my fellow PCPP staff members on a recent overseas trip.

After begging for what seemed like years to go on an overseas junket, this member of staff was finally invited to go overseas to attend a games expo and interview a few developers. Of course he jumped at the opportunity. Now whilst most people may look at an overseas trip as either a holiday or maybe even part of the job, games journos look at them as nothing but an opportunity to drink copious amounts of alcohol, make fools of themselves and maybe air their genitals in public. The latter is just idle speculation but I wouldn't put it past some of my fellow staffers. This is not at all a one-off incident - over the years I've heard stories of drunken E3 correspondents trying to break into the wrong room after a hard night on the piss and even a bunch of French games journalists who left a press tour due to the fact that the PR company footing the bill wouldn't shout them some hookers but that, as they say, is a different story. A very different story.

The story I'm about to relate isn't nearly that bad but well illustrates how ingrained this problem is on our small subsection of society. Now this individual is, as I mentioned before, new to the whole junket experience, never having travelled for work, only for pleasure. What is the first thing he does after getting off the plane? Ask the rest of us whether we wanted to find a pub and have a couple of drinks before dinner. Being more used to the whole junket experience we declined, knowing we'd be in for a

heavy session during the PR events scheduled for later in the night. We were. Now it may sound hypocritical of me to be condemning the actions of another whilst partaking in the same behaviour myself. It is - in part. Whilst I admit that I enjoy the not infrequent tittle and the occasional binge I at least know when to do it - when there's enough people around in a similar state of inebriation to cover your drunken attempts at charm and cutting critique (Don't you mean when the bar tab's on someone else? - Ed). This individual did not, rather preferring to keep in a constant state of drunkenness for what seemed like the entire time we were on the ground.

Whilst there's nothing wrong with enjoying the occasional drink, it's high time my fraternity brothers and sisters realised that they are not Australian sports legends, the only group that has the right, nay, the obligation to act like a drunken yobbo at any given opportunity. We need to look at the differences between ourselves and these sporting greats and realise that not only are we in a different social strata, we may as well be an entirely different breed. On the surface there are plenty of physical similarities between ourselves and some of Australia's sporting heroes. Take David Boon for example. Now Boonie is a prime example of both a national sports icon and a good all-round Aussie bloke. If taken on a purely physical level you can notice the following similarities between Boonie and the average (male) games journalist - the girth, the gait and the groan. Boonie is justifiably proud of his beer gut, gained through excessive hours of in-flight drinking. Whilst we are by no means as proud, many of the reviewing fraternity have what could be described politely as a slight softness around the middle. Due to the added girth and propensity for sitting on our arses all day, many of us have adopted the kind of gait similar to that of Boonie trying to get it back to the wicket - a kind of lazy shuffling run that seems to emulate a human trying to run on a planet with four times as much



gravity as our beloved Earth. The groan is harder to describe. Watch an interview with Boonie - he always seems to be tired or hung over, groaning every time he is forced to move or making excuses for why he feels the way he does. Games journalist often utilise the same groan to signal that they were out the night before getting blotto on Microsoft's tab or that they haven't slept before because the newest best game ever is just too addictive.

On the surface level you can see why as a social strata we feel compelled to "pull a Boonie" as I like to call it but it's the difference between ourselves and the cricketing great that should put an end to our utterly debauched behaviour. Boonie may be fat, sound like he's barely literate (let alone vertebrate) and imbibe more alcohol than any sane man could possibly consider healthy but he has something that we could never aspire to - respect. That's where the big difference comes in. Boonie can go to a foreign country, act like a total dick and be called a national hero but we try the same thing and we're scum. It's a double

standard that is not fair. Looking at it in this light the conclusions are obvious. As Derryn Hinch was wont to say all those years ago - society is to blame. Games journalists drink because of you. It's your fault their livers are being punished. We drink to be accepted and then drink some more because we are not. Or maybe it's the PR companies that are leading the brotherhood astray by lowering our resistance to marketing through the judicious use of bar tabs. Maybe it's the constant deadlines and pressure of churning out a quality product every month. Of course it could be a lot simpler - games journalism may just attract piss-heads.

*The Guerrilla Gamer is a veteran PC games journalist who doesn't seem able to accept that some people like things a little different to him. He once beat up a kid in a fast food restaurant because this kid right, this kid was making some kind of speech about liking pickles on hamburgers. Can you believe this guy? I ask you. Now get out of my way, I'm about to finish Myst.*



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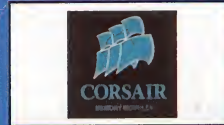


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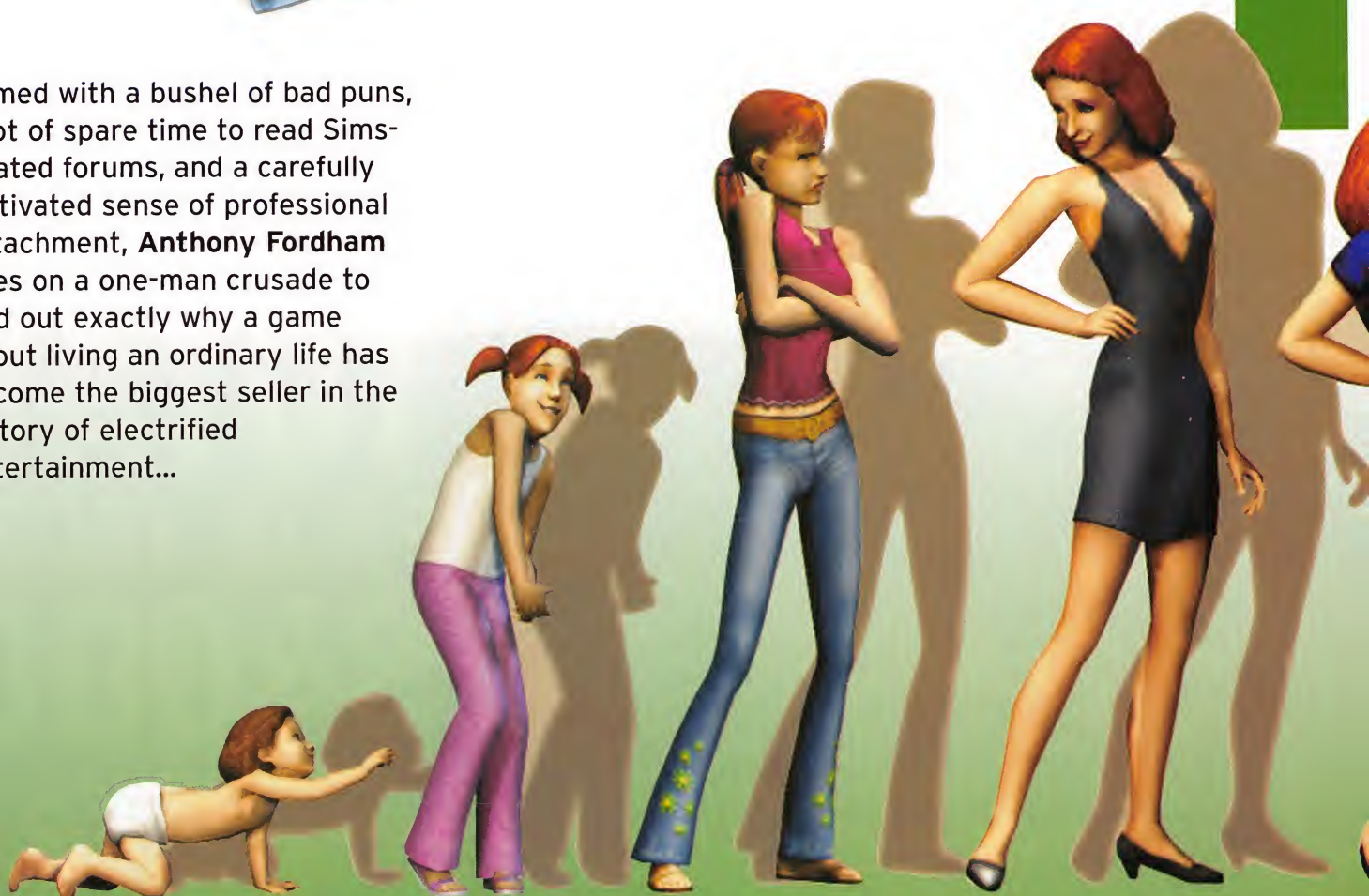




# sim



Armed with a bushel of bad puns, a lot of spare time to read Sims-related forums, and a carefully cultivated sense of professional detachment, **Anthony Fordham** goes on a one-man crusade to find out exactly why a game about living an ordinary life has become the biggest seller in the history of electrified entertainment...





# Play



**A look at the  
gaming phenomenon  
that is The Sims**

# Living







In a neat and tidy bedroom in Sydney's western suburbs, a young woman, let's call her Beth, is playing a computer game. Like her brother, she has a PC in her room. Unlike her brother, her PC is not cutting edge, not overclocked, doesn't have a window cut in the side and doesn't bathe the room in a sick green glow from internal cold cathode tubes. Also unlike her brother, Beth is still playing while little Johnny has long since gone to sleep, his CS ladder matches forgotten. Beth, you see, is playing The Sims.

She's currently putting the finishing touches to a rambling Californian-style bungalow, a sixteen room monstrosity lovingly decorated with more than two hundred individual items. It's the ultimate dollhouse because once Beth has finished arranging every last stick of furniture down to the millimetre, she unpauses the game and lets her family of four sims interact with their new home.

Beth then spends the next four hours helping her sims use the executive-style kitchen, relax in the open-plan living area, feed their many and varied pets, even go to the toilet in the vast chessboard-tiled bathroom. Later, she plonks them all in the hot tub on the back deck, stretches, and finally saves the game and shuts down her three year old PC. Only then does she go to bed. It's 2:30am. On a schoolnight.

## Addictive personality

This little vignette is typical of Beth's computer usage, she tells me a couple of weekends later over a coffee in that great shrine to capitalism, Penrith Plaza.

"It was actually my brother who first brought home The Sims," she says, "when it was brand new. He used to play the Sim City games and spend ages building really big cities only to knock them down again with UFOs and earthquakes. So he thought The Sims would be the same kind of thing but with people. He played it for a couple of days and then got bored with it so I asked if I could have a go, found out it ran really well on my PC, and that was it. I was addicted."

She isn't alone. The Sims has become the best-selling game in the history of electronic entertainment, eclipsing even the mighty Myst in terms of raw sales figures. Analysts suspect it has a wider audience than any other game, and that its success is due primarily to the girlfriends and wives of the first wave of hardcore gamers who bought the game and then, as

Beth's brother did, got bored with it.

The game's reputation soon spread via word of mouth, and games emporiums the length and breadth of the western world were besieged by enough first-time gamers to keep The Sims and its many, many expansions at or near the top of sales charts for the best part of four years. Every time it slips, EA releases another special edition pack at a new special edition price and the digital people and their digital lives are back.

## Insect origins

I spoke to Maxis heavyweight and game design icon Will Wright about the Sims phenomenon and how a man famous for building slightly dry city simulators ended up creating a game that has a place reserved for it in history alongside the likes of Pacman, Space Invaders and Doom - that is, if it ever actually becomes history.

"Actually the first germ of an idea for The Sims came from an earlier game we did called Sim Ant," says Wright. "In that game you took control of an ant colony

## The Sims has become the best-selling game in the history of electronic entertainment





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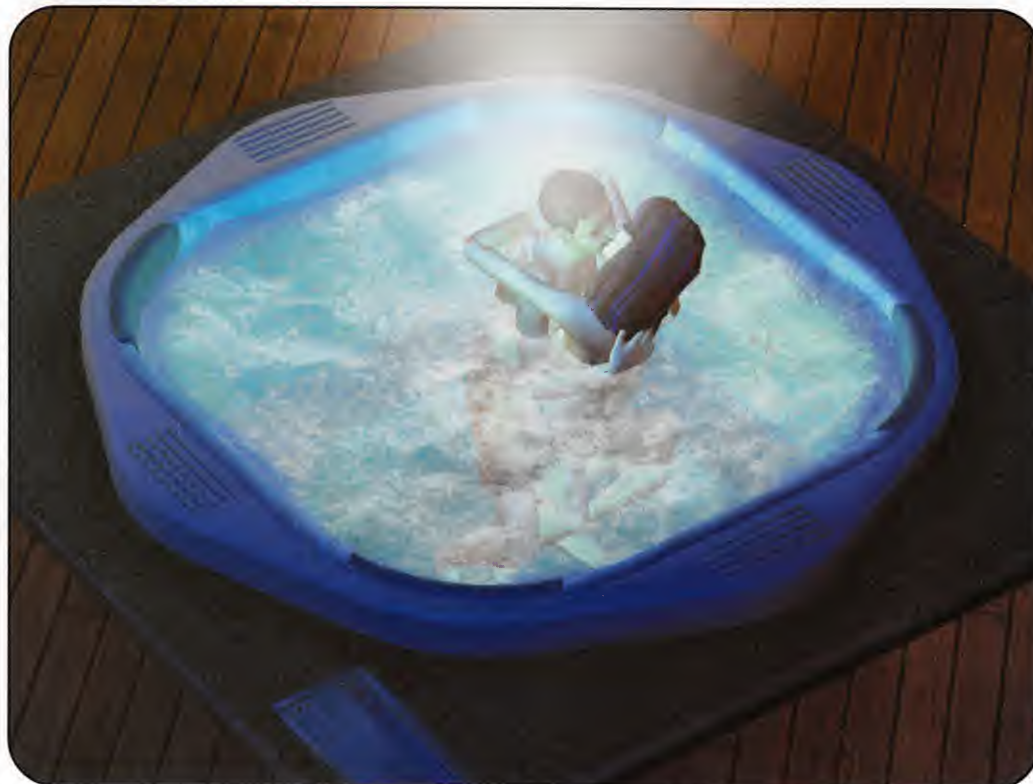
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and had to invade a house. It was sort of a more compact version of Sim City that had a more definite set of goals. The interesting thing was that in the house lived a little man and he would autonomously go around doing things while you planned your invasion - he would mow the lawn or sit and watch TV or cook, that sort of thing.

"What was also interesting is that both his and the ants' behaviour was determined not by some complicated AI network but by their surrounding environment. The precise situation they were in at any given time went a long way to determining their behaviour. After Sim Ant was finished I started thinking about how this could apply to actual people and how the player's manipulation of a virtual person's environment could affect their behaviour."

Wright goes on to explain that as a result, the original prototype of The Sims wasn't a people game at all, it was an architecture game.

## First home owner

"It was Sim House basically," he says, "I read a book called A Pattern Language by Christopher Alexander and others, and it basically talks about developing a language for successful building and community design, and I worked a lot of their ideas into this house. The central idea of the game would be that players built a house and then let a little person inside and that person's satisfaction or lack thereof with the building would determine the score."

"Eventually though our behaviour model for the little person got so complex that we realised the game wasn't about the house at all, it was about the person. So we turned our design on its head, did a whole lot more prototyping, and eventually came up with something that more or less resembles the game you play today."

So from fairly obscure academic origins, the modest popular PC game of the 21st Century was born. But what is it about The Sims that makes non-gamers like Beth embrace it to the detriment of relationships, job and person hygiene?

"I think it's just so emotionally engaging," says Wright, "it's really easy to see why your sim is reacting in a certain way, and it's easy to see what

you have to do to improve it. But that said, the game is also incredibly open-ended, we designed it like that deliberately. You can be cruel to your sim if you want, you can pamper it, you can do pretty much anything. And the nature of the application is that we can add more and more content pretty much infinitely. And not only that, the players themselves can also add content, and that I think is what has cemented the game's success.

"There is just so much player generated content out there, even before we released the game there were more than 100 sites offering downloads."

## Big gamble...

While Maxis is currently basking in the glory of the biggest gaming success story of recent years and enjoying the fawning attention of one of the world's biggest publishers, Electronic Arts, the success of The Sims was not always a foregone conclusion.

"We thought it would either be a decent little seller or a massive flop," says Wright, "depending on whether or not people 'got' the game. We were worried for a long time that they would perceive it as an adventure game, which at the time was a bit of a dead-end genre."

Fortunately, fans did get the game after all and took to it like no title had been taken to before.

"Even with that amazing sell-through rate, it's the fans who continue to keep the game alive,"



**Will Wright thought The Sims would either be a decent little seller or a massive flop**





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says Wright. "Without that community and all the new content they keep generating, interest would naturally flag. But these people keep bringing new stuff to the game, they keep other people excited about it."

## ...big payoff

For Wright though, the biggest plus to come out of the Sims is the mandate he feels he has won with his publisher, EA.

"Most big developers have to stick with safe projects," he says. "Not many people get to do wild experimental stuff like the Sims. I don't feel overawed by the success of the game, but I do feel that it gives us permission, if you like, to keep going in this direction, to keep trying crazy new things."

And in an industry dominated by endless WW2 shooters and fantasy-themed MMORPGs (that no one plays) this can only be a good thing for us gamers.

Meanwhile, spare a thought for Beth and millions of other Sims players out there cloistered away in bedrooms, using outdated machines, painstakingly applying a new wallpaper texture to yet another extension or planning a virtual party for a bunch of virtual people. When I look at Beth, I think perhaps Will Wright isn't such a gaming hero after all..

## THE SIMS 2

It was inevitable really; The Sims has proven to be such a tasty pie it's no surprise that EA and Maxis are headed back for another slice. But where do you go next with the ultimate game? If the original has so much replayability, runs on every PC in the field and can be bought either on the cheap or as part of a very chunky special edition, why would fans want to fork

### WILL WRIGHT ON... THE GOOD OLD DAYS

"I've been building games for around 20 years now so if you ask me do I think that advances in technology have allowed us to do things that we never dreamed of back in the 80s, I'd say sure. But I wouldn't say that I feel any more 'free' as a designer now as I did back then. In those days, building a game was something you could do solo or as part of a tiny team. It was more like painting at home than working on a huge movie. And the technological limitations were what kept us creative - the restrictions gave meaning to the design space. And most importantly there were no market expectations, we didn't have to design according to projected sales."



out another \$100? Sims 2 head of production and development Lucy Bradshaw thinks she knows why.

### Sim Fruitfly

"While The Sims really communicated with gamers on a level unlike any other title, the game still had its limitations. Most obvious was that your sims only live in the moment - they appear in the world fully grown, they live from day to day and all you have to worry about is their happiness at any given moment.

"What the fans wanted was a complete life cycle for their sims. They wanted to follow their sim through his or her childhood, her difficult teenage years, her

productive adulthood and her gentle old age.

"The Sims 2 is all about responding to the fans. We read hundreds and hundreds of emails and forum posts, because people are investing a lot of time and effort into The Sims and we want to reward that with the sequel."

To this end the core of the game has been considerably beefed. The Sims 2 now has a lot in common with virtual life games such as the Creatures series, where digital DNA and learned behaviour combine to create complex characters and situations.

"We're not going as hardcore as some of the games out there, especially Creatures, since we don't



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## WILL WRIGHT ON... THE SIMS ONLINE

"The Sims Online was an obvious project to do but we quickly found that the MMORPG subscription model just didn't fit with The Sims' core audience. These are people to whom buying a game means walking into a shop and making a one-time payment. They're not used to the idea of monthly subscription fees, so we were battling uphill from the start. The second thing is that while The Sims Online may look pretty much the same as The Sims, it's a very different game. We've found that most hardcore Sims players use the game as a virtual sandbox and employ both time and money cheats to build intricate homes and families quicker, and obviously this kind of thing doesn't work online. In fact, not being able to manipulate time was probably the biggest drawback with The Sims Online when it came to attracting a traditional Sims audience. The Sims Online isn't a Sims game really, it's more of a hardcore RPG."

model individual chromosomes, we just stick to what's important in inheritance," says Bradshaw. "So baby sims will inherit physical appearance from both their mother and father and their memories will be affected by how happy the whole family is during their childhood."

## Sim Elephant

Even more significant than genetics, Maxis is banking on memory to make the big difference with the sequel.

"Sims no longer live just in the moment," says Bradshaw. "Their memory will directly affect the kind of life they lead. A deprived and lonely childhood will make it more difficult for them to interact with other sims when they grow up. Similarly, a rich and privileged childhood will make them less tolerant of a more austere lifestyle, so players will have to spend time making sure the grown offspring of rich sims can also expect the finer things in their own home."

There will be six distinct ages for each sim: baby, toddler, child, teen, adult and elder. The range of activities available will depend on which age bracket the sim currently occupies, so toddlers won't be able to go out and get jobs and teens won't play with coloured blocks or use the potty.

## Sim Reaper

And at last death will make an appearance in a PC game not as a thing of violence or disaster but as a normal part of life. Elder sims will eventually die, and Maxis has made sure their deaths will be meaningful for the



## WILL WRIGHT ON... HIS FAVOURITE GAME

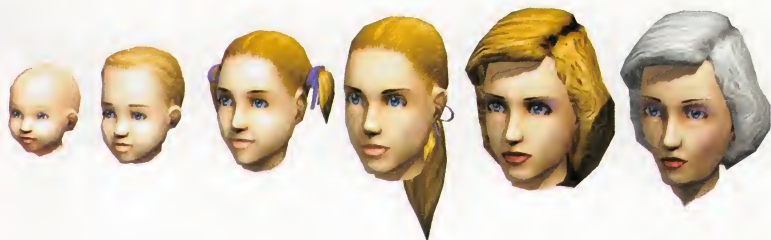
"Actually The Sims is my favourite of all the games I've worked on. And that's because of the community. Most games, you spend months or even years working on them and you send them out and all you know about whether or not people liked them is how good the sales figures are. With the Sims we got this great, responsive community. We get dozens of emails daily thanking Maxis for making such a great game, and a lot of these are obviously from people who don't normally play that many games. It feels good that we're reaching a new audience."

whole of their extended sims family.

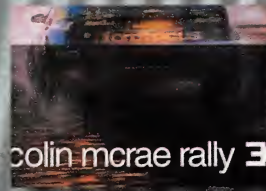
"We also treat it with a good sense of humour, with our tongues firmly in cheek. It's not supposed to be traumatising, it's supposed to be the end of a good and useful life," says Bradshaw.

"Of course we'll still be giving players the same kinds of freedom they enjoyed in the original game, so if you want to wall up your sim and let them starve, you can still do that. But we hope we'll have put enough into the Sims 2 to make you want to keep your sim alive for as long as possible, because it's just so fun to play."

One thing seems a given: the new feature set is going to make hardcore sims fans wet themselves with excitement. But it remains to be seen if the rest of the gaming community will buy in... again.







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# Tribes: Vengeance

There's something slightly absurd about travelling to Singapore to interview a guy based in Canberra. Daniel Wilks says he'll drink to that...

**24** hours of sleep deprivation was my preparation for flying to Singapore to get a hands-on look at some early code of Irrational Game's highly anticipated new addition to the Tribes franchise, Tribes Vengeance. As the Guerrilla Gamer has probably made you painfully aware of by now, us games journalists are wont to literally piss opportunities away, so after the eight hour flight to the small Pacific-rim country I set about my dedicated regimen of hard drinking and nonsensical drunken observations, recited, I am told at the top of my voluminous lungs to anyone who would listen. My memory is hazy at best but I seem to recall a bunch of kids dressed as Hobbits continuously trying to steal my passport and a chick dressed as one of Tolkien's token female elves who had a remarkably cute arse. Looking back I really hope it was a chick.

After my hard night of booze-soaked hilarity, I awoke early in the balmy Singaporean morning with all of the light in the universe trying to burn its way into my corneas and one of the annoying Hobbits from the night before having taken up residence in my head I faced what I had come here for - speaking to Irrational Games about their latest opus, Tribes Vengeance. The room we were in is full of screaming journalists and flashing CRTs - two things guaranteed to hurt you when you're suffering from a hangover the size of the hemisphere's largest shopping centre (located in Argentina in case anyone was wondering). Be that as it may I had a job to do so summoned up all the intestinal fortitude I could muster (not a great deal) and plonked myself down onto a stool next to Michael Johnston, a senior designer from Irrational Studios. Now I may be wrong but I have a funny feeling that Michael may have had a hard



night before because without the usual interview preamble (how are you, having a good time, etc) he hit me with a question, asking me what I thought of the first two games in the series. My mind began racing - what the hell was going on? I was meant to be the one asking the hard-hitting questions, not him. I muddled through some feeble excuse about liking the game but not being able to ski well enough to play at any respectable level of skill and that I prefer single player games anyway. Apparently that was exactly the right thing for me to say (this guy was good), as Michael quickly fired back, "I hear that a lot. It's easy to say that you haven't put in enough time to ski properly but you shouldn't have to dedicate lots of time to enjoy a

game. That's something we've tried to address. We've also put a focus on single player.

"I went on to explain that the decision for Irrational to pick up the Tribes franchise was a very interesting one to me, as Irrational has a reputation for very well plotted single player games and by and large the plot of the Tribes series thus far has been that there are two sides, both of which are well armed and don't particularly like each other. Michael agreed, saying, "Let me tell you, it was quite a challenge to go from having the two sides to having a compelling and cohesive story." What makes Tribes Vengeance even more interesting is that the same individual responsible for the plotting and scripting of System

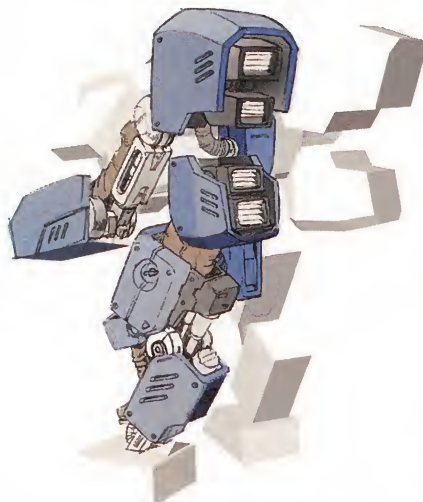
Developer: Irrational Publisher: Sierra Distributor: Vivendi Due: March 2004





Shock 2 is writing the game's script! Michael went on to suggest that I have a look at a multiplayer demo video, as the fact that there was only one PC currently running the code in the room made it rather difficult to pit his skill against what roughly passes for mine.

Although only a fraction complete, the code for Vengeance looks incredibly polished. Using a tweaked version of the Unreal Warfare engine, Tribes Vengeance incorporates all of the features we are coming to expect from the current generation of games - realistic physics (courtesy of Karma), ragdolling and deformable terrain. Although the similarities to the previous games in the series are obvious with the simulated players skiing (sliding down slopes to gain momentum and height for jetpack jumps) all over the vast open-air maps, things quickly veered into new territory with the introduction of city environments



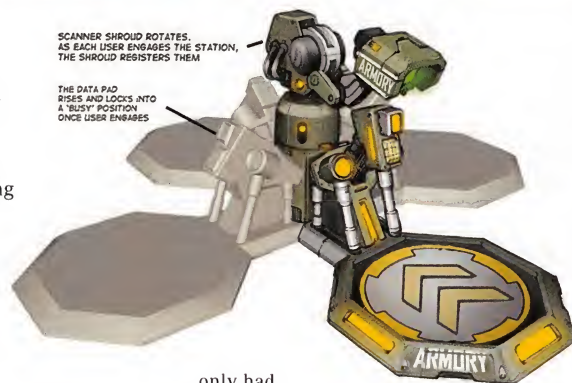
**Although only a fraction complete, the code for Vengeance looks incredibly polished**

and even some underground maps. There are even some arena style maps for an as-yet-unnamed sports style game that will feature in both single and multiplayer. Sensing my interest, Michael informed me that, "The game supports between 2 and 32 players for multiplayer. One of the big problems with the previous Tribes games was that you needed quite a large number of players to really enjoy the game - around eight or so. We've created the maps for 2-32 players so you can play anything from a duelling game to something large scale".

Next Michael fired up the code and added a few bots for me to get some hands on experience. The thrill of being one of the first to try a new game is great but it was slightly marred due to the fact that the only bots that had currently been written were exceptionally hard and inhumanly accurate, so I

SCANNER SHROUD ROTATES.  
AS EACH USER ENGAGES THE STATION,  
THE SHROUD REGISTERS THEM

THE DATA PAD  
RISES AND LOOKS INTO  
A 'BUSY' POSITION  
ONCE USER ENGAGES



only had about 30 seconds after each spawn to try things out. Whilst I "played", Michael kept up a running commentary on what I was seeing, pointing out such tidbits as, "there are 10-12 weapons, five of which are completely new. There are four new vehicles, two ground and two air. We've focused on streamlining lots of stuff as well. That was another of the problems with Tribes - there was all these systems and equipment and crap, most of which were never used. We've focused on making every single piece of

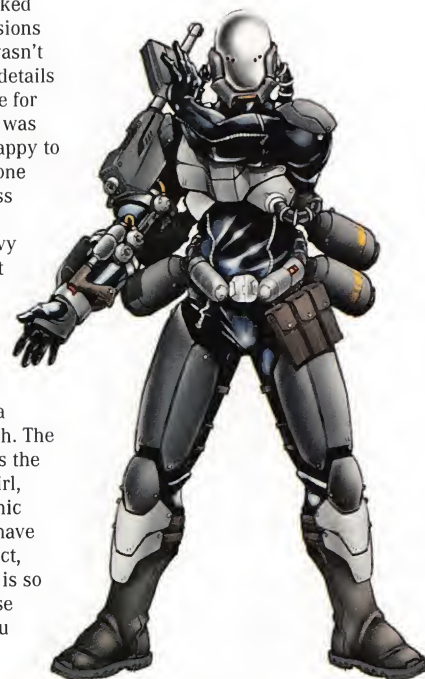




unbeknownst to me, my beloved Dictaphone decided it no longer cared about what Mr. Johnston had to say and proceeded to record another 30 minutes of static. There's nothing quite so frustrating as discovering that after 16 odd hours in the air and a further 24 off my face to talk to a guy who actually lives in Canberra that the bloody interview that the whole trip was planned around was rendered only half usable due to the machinations of a stupid inanimate object. Luckily a few days after arriving back at home sweet home, Vivendi thankfully aided in an emergency Q&A with Ken Levine, the General Manager and Creative Director at Irrational games and more importantly the genius behind the plot. With his help I managed to get the answers to the questions that had been lost to the Asia-Pacific void, most notably, what form will the single player game take? Ken started by stating that, "Missions follow a storyline, but not necessarily a time line. The story is essentially about a mother and a daughter, both as young women and what happens to them as warriors". He went on to add, "There are several lead characters. Traditionally, in a single player/first person shooter, the gamer feels like he is on an assembly line, going from one event to the next in a chronological fashion and always in the shoes of the same character. We wanted to break out from this in Tribes and not only have different personas and different styles of gameplay accompanying those personas, but have a different way

## The next mission could see you as the David Beckham of the Tribes universe

of tracking time. The gamer may be following a story but a different chronology. Think of the movie Pulp Fiction. A story is being told but the way it is presented is broken up and more 'free'. We think this is freer for the audience as well. We are putting a lot of faith in our audience by saying that we think you are ready for something more complicated than being spoon fed a linear chronological path". Next I asked Ken about the individual missions expecting to be told that he wasn't able to give me any concrete details due to the game not being due for another 6 or so months, but I was wrong. Ken was more than happy to volunteer the following - "In one mission you are a second-class citizen, a phoenix tribesman fighting for your life in a heavy suit of armour. Then, the next mission could see you as the Imperial Princess who also happens to be the David Beckham of the Tribes universe trying to save the day for her team in a Championship Sporting match. The next mission could see you as the same woman but as a little girl, living through this catastrophic experience where you don't have any armour or jetpacks. In fact, when you find the jetpack, it is so over-powered for you, because you are this little girl that you have to learn how to fly a whole new way".



equipment both fun and useful. We've also gotten rid of or streamlined a number of systems. We have a kind of radar HUD as part of the screen whereas in Tribes you had to press a key to access the radar". Seeing my ungainly attempts at skiing, Michael smiled and effortlessly segued into another topic: "You mentioned that you had some trouble skiing. We've written our own physics system and plugged it in. It's kind of cool - running down hills will actually speed you up. Hopefully this will help to make the game less frustrating to new players - sure it's not as fast as skiing but it should definitely help them get around".

It was about this time that







# The Nightmare factory



When PC gamers talk of genre, they tend to mean FPS, RPG or RTS. But genre originally referred to the context rather than the mechanics. David Thomas celebrates the oft-overlooked horror game and its link to industry innovation...

A particular school of thought suggests that if you imagine yourself to be the director, you'll never be scared when watching a horror film. The idea behind this is of course that the feeling of 'horror' is dependent on your immersion in the narrative and images, and forgetting that you're watching a film. This doesn't always hold water though; few people can claim that *The Exorcist* wasn't at least a tiny bit unnerving, including the director. I tried very hard not to be scared by *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, using this very technique, but it didn't help much. I still purchased a mattress protector shortly after watching it, and I'm certainly never going anywhere near the Deep South. I don't even like going near the edge of the Coles car park anymore.

Why is it that some horror films slap you in the face with humour and gore, while others just stare at you quietly, waiting for you to look away? It seems clear that the horror film is no single entity, so how can the horror computer game be anything more cohesive? Put simply, the idea of 'genre' is not as stable as it looks, and computer games are by no means free from this problem. Producers and developers have to consider these kinds of things if they want their games to be successful.

In the realm of literature and film, the centre of the horror story is something 'unknowable'. It is something that seems to exist outside of possibility, whether it is a monster, a haunted house, or an unexplained disappearance. We are placed in the paradox of being attracted to something that repels us. Essentially, horror stories are stories of discovery, and it is the trepidation caused by uncovering the truth that drives the narrative forward. Definitely a formula made for the computer.

Contemporary horror films have, however, mutated into something quite different from the traditional Gothic style tales. Horror is now a

much more unsettling and sophisticated realm. It is no longer primarily fantasy, it has become paranoid, and it sees the world as unreliable, unstable and perpetually nervous. This is no doubt partly due to the advancement of film-making techniques, and indeed the social circumstances out of which films are produced. Once upon a time, Hollywood had clear enemies as the basis for its stories of invasion and bodily attack, and there are identifiable cycles of production that coincided with social upheavals. Yet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the enemy is not so obvious, and is usually something far closer to home than monsters, aliens and haunted houses.

Computer games have undergone a similar transformation, but have not moved away from the traditional staples of the Gothic horror genre with as much enthusiasm as film until very recently. The history of the horror game is, unsurprisingly, parallel with the development of gaming technologies, and in fact, breakthroughs in the development of computer games over the last decade or so can usually be linked to the emergence of a horror title.







The golden year for PC computer games was almost certainly 1993. The original *Doom* was released, and was the grand-daddy of the first person shooter. While not explicitly a horror game, it certainly laid the foundation for one side of the modern horror genre. The other was set in motion by *Alone in the Dark*. Like *ID*, *Infogrames* took a step away from the *Quest* games and text-based adventures. The limitations of the hardware at the time now seem considerable, but the developers of both titles managed to create games so involving that any technical shortcomings seemed

insignificant. *Alone in the Dark* used bizarre devices called polygons for its characters and surroundings, creating a moving environment in a different way to *Doom*'s sprites, and players responded to the superior 'feel' offered by these techniques. Both these games were very good reasons to own a high-end 386.

Shortly after these titles were released, *The 7th Guest* emerged, and was one of the first games to require a CD ROM (and indeed has been credited with solidifying the place of the CD ROM in home computers), and was also one of the first awkward steps into live video cut scenes. A series of puzzles and a unique user interface made it both very playable and very good to look at. While both *The 7th Guest* and *Alone in the Dark* were essentially mystery stories dressed up with horror themes, the graphical developments had provided players with a new way to experience atmosphere, and horror, in a game. Cinematic production values entered the gaming world.

*Realms of the Haunting* exhumed some very familiar horror clichés from the film grave in 1996; the haunted house, the escape situation and the search for answers as to the demise of a relative (in this case the father of the protagonist). Using a combination of primarily action-based game play and video cut-scenes, *Realms of the Haunting* was an evolutionary step forward from *The 7th Guest*. It was generally well received, and helped solidify the use of keyboard and mouse to control a character. Despite the technical innovations though, the horror in these games remained

very true to the typical clichés of Gothic literature and film.

Away from the PC world, a couple of games that really can't be ignored appeared on the PlayStation. The 'survival horror' game (a sub-genre that began with *Alone in the Dark*), found a champion in Capcom's *Resident Evil*, and *Resident Evil 2*. Where the 7th Guest motivated CDROM sales, *Resident Evil 1 & 2* moved enormous amounts of PlayStations off the shelves. In the first game, an old mansion outside Raccoon City sprang into (un)life, setting the stage for the second game, which knocked everything else flat. Raccoon City itself was thrown onto the screen, and with enormous success. All those gamers who had been hanging out since *Dawn of the Dead* for some sweet zombie action to parallel the vision of George Romero were finally rewarded. Of course the load times were shocking, and having to continually watch opening doors gets old really fast, but all things considered, this was one hell of a game.

*Silent Hill* emerged soon after, and from the outset was a less frivolous game than *Resident Evil*, despite the obvious similarities. This was a seriously unnerving piece of work. Subscribing with earnest to the atmosphere over action formula, the game is a confronting experience. Players might sit around watching *Resident Evil*, laughing when something made them jump, but *Silent Hill* was different. Players don't laugh, they worry about bowel control, or they quickly offer to make the coffees, or get the urge to tidy the house. Several people have told me that they were literally unable to play the game alone, such is the level of atmospheric intensity.

Not long after *Resident Evil* and *Silent Hill* made such an impact, PC technology started to accelerate away from what was possible on a console at that time. With the increasing powers technology provided to game designers and producers, increasing sophistication started to appear in games. This is also about the time

**Alone In The Dark used bizarre devices called polygons for its characters, creating a moving environment in a different way to Doom's sprites...**





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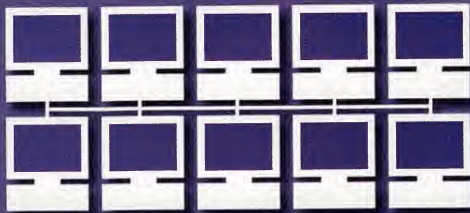
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when the first person shooter and the horror game became one very large and unruly being.

ID was in the thick of Quake 1 and 2 in November 1998 when an amazing thing happened to PC games; Half-Life and 3D accelerator cards. The gaming industry, as we all know only too well, really exploded at this point. The multiplayer side of games really came to life, and video cards became the arch nemesis of the cash-strapped gamer. In the blur of technological advancement since '98, some great horror games managed to struggle their way to the surface. Obviously the Quake series and Half Life are horror games of sorts, but the horror of the first

person shooter is a kind of by-product of the format of the game, not its focus. These games were shooters first and foremost.

American McGhee's Alice cropped up with little fanfare. It relied heavily on stylized artwork for its effect. The estrangement of the familiar throughout this game paves the way for an array of pretty decent horror motifs. Freud said the uncanny was often unsettling or frightening precisely because of its

strongly story-driven, this game was indicative of an emergent trend to try and cross the line between the two established versions of the horror game, the shooter and the survival game.

More recently, Return to Castle Wolfenstein is a great example of the murkiness of the horror genre. It really couldn't quite decide if it was a war game or not, having an almost schizophrenic narrative structure swaying evenly between classic war

boundaries and definition of horror are so permeable.

To this end, I'm genuinely surprised that Battlefield 1942 doesn't have a 'Gothic Vampire Nuns in Tight PVC and the Zombies who love them' mod yet. The producers of BloodRayne certainly thought that was a good idea. The few games mentioned are a mixed bag to be sure, and are indicative of the very broad spectrum of horrific possibilities so far seen on the PC. The lingering stench of horror has raised a question however; is it just a by-product of the juggernaut of first person shooters? These games rely on a certain amount of suspense and violence for their effect, so they must be horror games, right? Time to call in some help.

Tim Willits, level designer on Doom3, and Brady Bell, the project lead and creative director on Clive Barker's Undying shared some of their thoughts on the finer points of creating horror, and attempting to scare people. These guys clearly take the less tangible, creative side of their work very seriously. While obviously each has a different conception of 'The Horror Game', much of what we gleaned from them echoes some familiar sentiments.

**"We like to build situations where we put the player in a panic; you're low on ammo, low on health, all the lights go out... and then you get attacked"**

familiarity, and here we have an already quite alarming children's story turned into a full-tilt nightmare.

Clive Barker's Undying, taking notice of the techniques of Silent Hill, adopted an atmospheric bent. When it was released gamers were literally blown away by the scenery and sound effects. This game really brought to prominence the importance of sound in horror games. A FPS that was quite

game and zombie kill-fest. Certainly this is no bad thing, but if we follow this line of logic, it becomes difficult for us to say that any game is or isn't a horror game. Was RTCW a horror game with a war setting, or a war game with some horror elements? Without becoming bogged down in contemporary genre theory, it has to be sufficient just to accept that it is difficult for computer games to escape the rotting, bony fingers of horror, when the







Tim Willits seems to possess an impressive desire for people to genuinely enjoy his work. He also mentions how much fun shooting people is, several times. "I enjoy a lot of the camp horror, but also get into the more genuine horror, like 'The Ring'. It's fun being scared." A vision of Texas Chainsaw Massacre pops into my head, and I try to remember how much fun that was.

"When I play, Silent Hill or Resident Evil, I really try to get into it; actually pretend I'm walking around. In a horror movie you sympathize with the character, so you worry about them dying, but in a game, you worry about yourself dying. You have this heightened anxiety I guess."

"What we're trying to do is this; we understand what you need is a good action game, you want to run around and shoot people, because that's fun. But what we also try to do is have situations that build suspense, you know, you open a door and hear a whisper, or some haunting ambient music, you're moving forward and then the big thing jumps out at you. It's the same as movies where you're building suspenseful momentum. But then, you know, it's just mixed with some good old fashioned gore,

just for fun."

Setting out to make the scariest game you can is a mammoth task in itself, but what happens when that game is so eagerly anticipated? Doom III has probably been in the making (at least in concept) longer than most games, and Willits explains how this can affect the creative process. "We're trying to make the best game that we possibly can, and I realize that some people aren't going to think it wasn't scary at all, and we just have to deal with those expectations. It's the same as a director making a movie that has certain expectations, thinking that some people will like it and some won't, so hopefully more people will like this than don't like it.

"We like to build situations where we put the player in a panic; you're low on ammo, low on health, all the lights go out, you hear some noise and then you get attacked, really setting up situations like that are a lot of fun to play around with."

It can be easy to forget that computer games encompass more than the latest pixel shaders and DirectX releases. The ever increasing levels of tech-fever produce a tendency for the actual game to be obscured behind its



technical prowess, or lack thereof. Willits and his colleagues tread the fine line between technical competence and solid game play very carefully. "We have a good balance here at ID, my focus is trying to make it fun, and the designers work with that, and John [Carmack] of course tries to make it look awesome and have a great engine to make it run fast. It really is a balancing act though, you do need to push the technology forward, people want to see the newest tech, but then you have to balance that with what you can do in the game play.

"Sometimes the tech doesn't allow you to do something and you just have to work around it. We just try to set out with a pretty cool goal, we want people to play Doom III, have a good time, maybe jump out of their chair a bunch of times, maybe get scared because all the lights went out when they've only got three bullets left and hear the zombie coming, just cool situations

well enough I guess."

Konami have recently announced a big screen version of Silent Hill, and crossovers between the games industry and Hollywood have been cropping up quite regularly now. "The computer game industry has such financial momentum behind it, and it's becoming more, for lack of a better word, legitimate. Perhaps we can start to attract some of the really high end directors and producers out of Hollywood that will make great movies based on game titles. Or if you have a really great movie and you can find a hot shot development team to make a game to coincide with it, it could work well. We have movie deals that we've worked on, we have an agent, but we don't by any means think that we can make a movie. Hopefully computer game companies don't think they can make movies. I think people should focus on what they know and what they're good at."

Sounding a little like George Lucas, Willits carefully explains why the Doom title was resurrected. "I think the main reason we're doing Doom III is that when John Carmack started out working on the original Doom, he had a vision for the game, and because of technology at the time he wasn't really able to create the vision he set out for. But when he started working on this new technology, he really thought he could make Doom the way he always envisioned it. The technology just seemed right for it.

"People have to realize that the



you know. Really, just have a good time playing the game, that's what we're hoping for.

"Games never turn out exactly the way you think they will, but you know, in some aspects this has turned out cooler, because of some of the special effects we can do, like flesh tubes and tentacles through the walls, some of the crazy phantasm stuff. But there are other things where I wish I could put the whole game in one map, for example, which would be awesome, but it has turned out

new Doom game is a slower paced game than the original. We have a lot of anticipation. We have some areas when there aren't any monsters. We build the suspense and we have some story tied in. It's not just 'open door-shoot guy-move on'. We really tried to set up moody, atmospheric, cool, spooky, creepy settings."

There is a downside to working on one of the most anticipated titles in gaming history. "It's unfortunate that I never really get to play Doom III, when I open the door and hear



the spooky music, I know the guy's going to jump out over there, so I never get to actually play it..."

Brady Bell's take on the horror game is a little different. He considers the horror movie in more detail. "I love and hate horror films. They play on our most basic emotions and more than any other genre; rapidly elicit the most amplified emotions. Nothing gets your blood pumping like being scared." Correct, I'm still thinking of Texas Chainsaw Massacre.

The question of precisely how to get the blood flowing is what we're here for. "Atmosphere. More than anything, horror games rely heavily on lighting, texturing and audio. For me, when those elements are executed properly I find myself in a mindset that's ridiculous for a grown man. You convince yourself you're seeing and hearing things which aren't there. Without atmosphere, it's



## Your life as a Vampire will be all politics and networking, with just enough eroticism and blood drinking to keep things interesting...



just a bad carnival ride.

"The themes we deal with were not created in games, nor were they created in film. Novels, plays and short stories popularized the themes which film mainstreamed and games now explore. As a storyteller, you need to supply the thematic elements which your audience is already familiar with. To be memorable, you need to then push your audience in a direction they didn't expect and give them something unique. It's the marriage of these two pieces that is the most difficult and rewarding for the creator and the audience."

Bell has clear feelings about the effect of technology on the gaming experience. "Developers often create their games over several years and get stuck in a 'catch-up' cycle that hinders their success. The tech-envy is usually about graphics and for good reason. It's sexy, easy to write about and gets gamers excited. At times this can lead to unrealistic opportunities in design, misdirected focus or missing a release date that would have served the game better.



But through all the games that suffer these bumps and bruises, it's still the game player that wins. I believe the tech race is leveling off and the focus for developers is returning to areas that will have a larger impact on the player's experience. If developers focus on pushing genres instead of poly's, everyone wins."

So it seems the horror game is a cumbersome thing. A vast number of games fall into this category but seem to bear little resemblance to each other. Atmosphere, gore, monsters, the occult and the undead, and plenty of other narrative devices have combined and recombined in different games in a manner that makes any definitive statement about the horror game seem futile. Well, except one. The horror game has been, and will continue to be, centrally important to the development of hardware and software.

The horror games emerging today are split fairly evenly between the first and third person.

The formula seems to be remaining unchanged, but increased sophistication, on the part of both developers and consumers, is making a big impact. Both Bell and Willits alluded to atmosphere as the key ingredient in their work, and it looks as though games are on the verge of really harnessing this to the full.

There are some exciting projects in development and some that are very close to release. It seems, in fact, that next 12 months might herald the same kind of gaming revolution as 1993 (but you didn't hear that from me, particularly if it doesn't happen). Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth is based on a role playing game that is in turn based on the work of HP Lovecraft. The game is based around a police detective whose sanity is not entirely up to scratch, investigating occult horrors in a small fishing town, and it looks to be something special. It has been in development for some time and should be a feast for fans of Lovecraft and the macabre, due in early 2004.

For those who tend towards RPGs, Activision's Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines is due for release between now and the end of the year. Using the HL2 engine, it promises to be worth the wait. Your life as a Vampire in this ridiculously good looking game will be all politics and networking, with just enough eroticism and blood drinking to keep things interesting, as you ascend through the ranks of one of the various clans of modern-day Los Angeles.

Silent Hill 3 will bring its undeniably scary feeling to the PC very soon; the extraordinary arrangement of silence, horrifying ambient sound and low visibility framing are sure to strike fear into the hearts of just as many people as

before. This might not be such a big deal for those who have followed the series on the 'Station, but is definitely a major release.

Of course, Half Life 2 is also agonizingly close to release. This will be the release of the year for many, and the first impressions from those who have had a glimpse back this up. Most of them are still picking up their jaws. Is it horror? You'll have to be the judge, but if it looks like it, and smells like it... At least the possibilities of horror continue to be tested by developers, which can only be a good thing.

And finally we come to Doom 3. It has certainly been a long time coming, and undeniably, has a lot to live up to. Most of the questions we have remain to be answered, but some things can be said with certainty. This game looks stupendous, and it comes from a team of people who have been gaming heavyweights for over a decade. We'll just have to wait and see how gamers (consumers) react. The fuss over nVidia, ATI and DX9 has caused a lot of unrest in the PC community, the long term result of which is anyone's guess. That said though, if Tim Willits' enthusiasm is anything to go by, it will be a hit. He said it will be slower, more atmospheric, and full of good old fashioned gore. A winning combination for this horror fan to be sure.

There are no standards for horror in the world of computer games. It is simultaneously a driving force and an invisible passenger, and it would seem that's the way we like it. Steven King once told an interviewer that society is a 'fertile ground for the seeds of terror', and this claim will resonate through the world of computer games with increasing importance in the very near future.



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# UNDER THE HOOD

## CALL OF DUTY

Call of Duty is one of those games that snuck up on us without a lot of fanfare, making the fact that it's looking so damn good even more impressive. In this month's Under the Hood we had a chat to Grant Collier, president of Infinity Ward, and Jason West, chief technology officer, about the mutated Quake 3 engine they developed to power this game's amazing scenes of WWII death and destruction.





### Can you please give us a little background on the CoD engine?

From the start of Call of Duty, we knew that the engine we used would only serve as a starting point for our own technology, so we chose to use the engine with which we're most familiar. So, we developed the Call of Duty Engine, which uses the basic framework, level editing tools, and network code of the Quake III engine - everything else was rewritten.

### 300 players on screen at a time? How on Earth did you manage this?

Efficiency. Every aspect of the Call of Duty Engine was designed to be as efficient as possible, from the animation system to the model skinning to the final rendering.

### The CoD engine makes use of some cutting edge graphics techniques to bring stunning character detail and gorgeous environments, not to mention realistic lighting effects. What are these features and how do they work?

The biggest factor in the quality of any engine is the art and level design that the engine is given to draw, so the artists and designers deserve much of the credit for this. The Call of Duty Engine does several things to make it possible for the artists and designers to create a lot of detail in the characters and environments.

One thing that we did is to entirely replace the model and animation systems. This allows us to have models with more detail while using a lot less memory. It also allows us to seamlessly blend between any number of animations, bringing the detailed characters to life.

To help the designers, we switched to a portal-based renderer rather than a PVS renderer. Essentially, this allows the PVS to be calculated at runtime for the exact place the camera is and the exact place the camera is looking, rather than precalculating the PVS for looking in all directions in a large volume of space, resulting in fewer useless triangles being processed and drawn.

Another thing we do is that the map compiler decomposes the level geometry into complex polygons, then uses some heuristics to come up with a good set of triangles that look the same but draw more efficiently.

We've also completely rewritten the light compiler to give better shadows. The Quake III light compiler would shoot rays at the lights from every 8 inches or so along a surface, and then add that light to the entire 8 inch square if the ray didn't hit anything. This causes "stairstepping"

artifacts on shadow boundaries. It also means that thin geometry either casts no shadow or casts a shadow that is too big; usually it does both, causing random black spots. To avoid these problems you would have to make simple geometry and basic lighting. Our light compiler, called Flare, works in the opposite way; it starts from each light source, and sees exactly how much light hits each surface, taking into account semi-transparent shadow casters. This gives anti-aliased shadow edges rather than stair-stepped edges, and it means that thin or complex geometry never leaves splotchy or extra wide shadows. In a very real sense, Flare frees up the designers to create more complex geometry without fearing that it will look bad when lit.

Finally, the engine draws geometry as efficiently as possible for a range of hardware, so that the designers and artists can have as much geometry as they need to create the amount of detail they want. At last count there were more than 25 code paths in the renderer optimized for different types of geometry on different hardware; as many as 9 or 10 of these code paths can be used in any one frame.

### How much of the Q3A engine did you rewrite, and why did you need to do so?

Well, as I mentioned, building from an engine we knew was a great starting point, but from there, we also knew that we had to overhaul it and rewrite it to make it possible to do the things we wanted to do with Call of Duty. Here's a short list of some of the all-new systems that were required to make our vision of Call of Duty possible:

- Hardware T&L portal renderer that makes it possible to feature 200,000 poly scenes.
- Improved light compiler for anti-aliased shadows and variable light-map density.
- Hierarchical blending skeletal animation system with body part hit detection, response



animation, and per-polygon bullet collision.

- Advanced squad-based AI and pathfinding, so that AI jump fences, climb through windows, cover one another, and even suppresses the enemy autonomously.
- Advanced scripting language, for cinematic scripted sequences.
- Advanced vehicle system, so that reinforcements arrive as they actually would on the battlefield.

### How do the level sizes of CoD compare to MOHAA - they seem much bigger?

We prefer to look forward and not compare things to the past. In Call of Duty, our aim from early on was to make the locations and maps as expansive as possible, but yet, fit within the parameters of the campaign at hand. So, really the maps differ from mission to mission to best fit what the player is in story for. Several of the Russian missions are definitely very large, which is a perfect fit for that part of the game. For example, in our downloadable demo level, the fighting was mostly outdoors, but you'll see some close-quarters environments later in the game that best suit those types of missions. Additionally, we needed the capability of large maps to support "vehicle ride" levels in which the vehicles drive at very high-speed.

### Sound is obviously very important for creating atmosphere and mood - can you tell us a little about the CoD engine's sound support?

We created an advanced sound system as part of our overall engine design. We went out and recorded authentic WWII weapons, as well as enlisting celebrity voices for our main characters. The sound system allows us to tweak the mix in a cinematic style so while you are in the chaos of battle you still know what is going on, pick up voice cues from your squad, etc.

### CoD engine AI. Discuss! Any new tricks that separate it from other game engines?

AI is a collection of a ton of technologies, large and small, that combine together to give the player convincing squadmates which help him battle challenging and fun opponents. There really is too much to cover, but here are some of my favorites:

- AI understand being suppressed. When anyone fires a bullet, all the AI in the area know about it, and understand not to cross that line of fire. AI in cover will stay in cover rather than jumping out into the line of fire. This allows you to actually provide "covering fire" to keep enemies down, while making that desperate run to a better position.
- AI understand suppression. AI will continue to fire at an enemy who has just achieved cover in order to suppress them (including the player). This allows the AI to take improved positions and flank.
- AI understand obstacles and obstacle navigation. The Level Designers place nodes that describe the environment, such as "fence here", "window here", "crawl space here", etc. The AI then navigate these obstacle as appropriate - so while you are guarding the door they are coming in the window or scaling over the wall.





• AI pathfinding and avoidance is solid. This is not as sexy as other features, but it makes all the difference. Friendlies do a good job of flowing around the player and not running into him. AI in general can find good positions from which to attack and defend.

AI pain, death, and movement are all based on the location and means of damage. If an enemy is running for cover and you shoot him in the knee he will stumble, pick himself up, and limp for cover. If you shoot an enemy in the stomach he buckles over in pain – at which time I recommend a rifle butt to the head.

### **How will these features, as well as any others, make CoD stand out from the rest of the crowd?**

Ultimately, it's about putting players into the center of action and helping them feel that they are in an epic war with intense battles raging on, all around them, but yet, knowing that they can and in some cases, must rely on their squad mates to survive. This is where our work to create an engine to support our vision of Call of Duty is so important. Because of our work in creating an advanced squad-based AI and pathfinding, players' squad-mates jump over fences and climb through windows; they provide cover fire and respond to cover fire – this is all meant to give the player the feel of fighting in an authentic and action-packed battle. The powerful scripting, AI, renderer, animation, and vehicle systems combine into an epic battlefield experience. Our streamlined data path allows level designers, artists, sound designers, and animators to get content into the game easily and quickly, which makes for a rich and dynamic world.

### **Will gamers need, or benefit from, any specific hardware when running CoD? For example, a DX9 video card, or Hyper-Threaded Pentium 4?**

You'll need a DX9 level video card to have all the options turned on to their highest quality settings. A DX8 level card is able to render all of our advanced shader effects, but it needs to run at a slightly reduced quality level to get best performance. Hyper threading will give a modest speed benefit in the more chaotic parts of the game. Systems with SSE support will get a noticeable speedup.

### **What is the baseline system necessary to run CoD with most of the eye candy turned on, at a resolution of 1024 x 768,**



## **PLAYERS SQUAD-MATES JUMP OVER FENCES AND CLIMB THROUGH WINDOWS; THEY PROVIDE AND RESPOND TO COVERING FIRE**

### **that will allow gamers to have smooth frame rates even during the most detailed/resource intensive scenes?**

Call of Duty detects your system resources on start-up and auto-configures optimal settings for your computer. This allows everyone to enjoy the complete experience, including the minimum spec of 600Mhz CPU with GForce1 or equivalent.

The resolution you can effectively play on is mostly a function of the memory on your graphics card. We set the optimal configuration to 1024X768 for 128 meg cards. As you increase main system memory over 128 your picmip settings increase since all the textures don't need to reside on the card, so this will give you sharper textures. As your CPU increases we increase the Level of Detail on the models, as well as other details like the number of corpses we maintain in the world.

### **Explain what the CoD physics engine can and cannot do.**

We always like to focus on our achievements and what we've been able to accomplish in developing Call of Duty. One thing in particular that we've worked hard to do is to install per-poly collision. This lets you shoot between the slats of a chair and make sure your bullets are never stopped by some approximate collision geometry. The body part-based damage and animation system make it much more rewarding to dispatch enemies in the fashion of your choice – shoot an enemy in the leg and when he is hunched over grasping his wound you can rifle butt him in the head.

On the larger scale, everything we've done with our physics and AI is meant to make you feel like you are part of something bigger, that there is a war going on all-around you. In our Stalingrad mission at one point we counted upwards of 300 soldiers on-screen at once – in addition to the planes, boats, mortars, etc. There is an epic intensity not seen in other games. This is something we've strived for from start to finish in Call of Duty.

### **Describe the network code of the CoD engine (dedicated server hardware requirements, maximum online players per server, bandwidth usage, client side vs server side code, etc).**

The network is one of the systems that we did not replace, as the Quake network code is solid and satisfies the needs of Call of Duty. Generally speaking you can expect similar bandwidth usage

requirements to those of Quake III or Return to Castle Wolfenstein.

### **Are there any other games in development using the CoD engine?**

You'll have to wait and see...

### **What would you like to implement in the next version of the CoD?**

It's too early to say anything right now, currently we're focused 100% on completing Call of Duty and giving fans the most riveting and action-packed experience ever.

### **Describe the modding and creation tools that the CoD engine will ship with.**

The SDK will be released after Call of Duty ships. What modders will notice out of the box is that all our multiplayer game logic is in script. How the match is scored, how spawn points are chosen, how players choose their weapon or team, how damage is done, and all the other gameplay decisions are done in a script for each gametype.

Creating new game modes is straightforward and easy. For example, you rename sd.gsc (the script for "Seek and Destroy") to osk.gsc (your "One Shot Kill" mod) and then change the damage function. It's worth pointing out these mods are server-side only, so nobody needs to download anything to play your new gametype. Also, the game modes that ship with Call of Duty were all done by our Level Designers/Scripter rather than programmers.

### **Anything else you'd like to mention about your new game engine?**

We have a lot of pride in the Call of Duty engine. Our engine has been created specifically to accomplish the gameplay aspects, features and special effects that are a perfect fit for the kind of game we set out to make. Where in previous titles we relied heavily on scripting to help tell the story, in Call of Duty we've concentrated on expanding the AI to more closely draw the player into the full feeling of fighting together in battle. The scripting that is employed is really used to enhance the level of player immersion as a supporting ambient effect, but it's the AI that players will walk away from that is most impressive. We're talking about squad-mates who fight along side you, provide cover and understand suppressing fire. That's something you can't script, so in Call of Duty, the experience the player feels is completely new and totally immersive.



# WARLORDS IV

## HEROES OF ETHERIA™

SEQUEL TO THE  
AWARD WINNING  
WARLORDS III



PC  
CD  
ROM



UBISOFT

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# GAMES IN REVIEW

**R**ight, Call of Duty, then. Okay, I'll shut up about it. Just read Bennett's review.

We love Christmas here at PCPP. Not only does it mean the mag is stuffed full of ads, ensuring we actually get paid, it's also crammed with game reviews. And unlike recent months, many of these games are even worth playing for more than half an hour.

Besides Call of Duty - which, incidentally, has garnered our highest score since GTA Vice City in PCPP#89, making Infinity Ward's stellar FPS the second best rated game of the year - we've also been playing a couple of other excellent shooters. Whilst CoD has all the substance, Max Payne 2 and XIII have stolen all the style, albeit in very different ways. Although you might catch us saying from time to time, "Graphics don't matter, it's all about the gameplay", there really is very little that's cooler than Dual Ingrams in Bullet Time or a three-frame close-up of a throwing knife to the head.

Of course, if you don't like shooters, then you might be disappointed this Christmas, as Commandos 3 and Temple of Elemental Evil flatter to deceive. But there's always Trainz 2 and Tiger Woods for the granddads (and Anthony) out there.

Next issue should see the rest of the pre-Xmas releases collected into air-sealed plastic bags and ushered into the office for forensic examination. Another bumper review issue awaits, but sadly no sign of Half-Life 2 this time...

David Wildgoose  
Editor



**65** Game of the Month  
Call of Duty

- |    |                |    |                  |
|----|----------------|----|------------------|
| 65 | Call of Duty   | 77 | Freedom Fighters |
| 68 | Max Payne 2    | 78 | Chrome           |
| 70 | XIII           | 80 | Commandos 3      |
| 72 | Enigma:        | 82 | Trainz 2004      |
|    | Rising Tide    | 83 | Generals:        |
| 74 | Temple of      |    | Zero Hour        |
|    | Elemental Evil | 84 | NHL 2004         |
| 76 | Tiger Woods    | 85 | Warlords IV      |
|    | 2004           |    |                  |



## GOLD AWARD



The ultimate accolade. A game that receives a Gold Award is an essential purchase, and the only excuse for not owning it is either not having a powerful enough PC, or not having a PC at all. Or arms. It represents a new direction in gaming, a new benchmark against which all others will be measured. It defines its genre, or creates a new one. It is gaming. You must own it.

**90+**

## HIGH DISTINCTION



This is the finest in gaming. A fresh concept, a perfect execution, a meaningful extension to a tried and tested format, one or all of these are required for this score. We strongly recommend the purchase of each High Distinction game, but extremely fussy gamers may want to skip those HD games that don't also receive Gold Awards.

**85-100**

## DISTINCTION



An intriguing new concept or a bold new direction that manages to pull its new trick off with a reasonable degree of flair. You will be impressed, at either the graphics, the gameplay or some other new element that you may not have encountered before. Or perhaps this is a familiar gaming concept, but one executed so well it's almost - but not quite - an essential purchase.

**75-84**

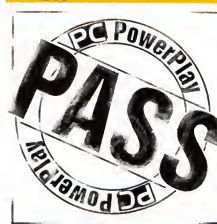
## CREDIT



Solid, playable, largely bug-free, entertaining and maybe even a bit unexpected, these are the hallmarks of a game of Credit. You may have seen it all before, but you won't mind, because a Credit game does what it says on the box - it plays well and it keeps you hooked. An essential purchase? Not necessarily, but worth consideration.

**65-74**

## PASS



A game that receives a pass is playable, but its concept may be flawed, its extras may be lacking or its graphical enhancements may have fallen off somewhere in a lengthy bug-fixing process. And bugs there may be, although in the end the game will, as we say, work. Purchase if you're curious, but discerning gamers will probably look for something more substantial.

**50-64**

## FAIL



There are more than 5000 games released each year. Some are gems. Some are merely unremarkable. Others are nothing more than a shameless grab for cash. Graphics will be rudimentary and gameplay will be worse. If you see someone considering a game that has failed, gently take them by the elbow and hurl them out of the shop. It's your duty as a good citizen.

**0-49**





# Call of Duty

Time to kick some more Nazi butt.



Developer: Infinity Ward Publisher: Activision Distributor: Activision Price: \$89.95 Rating: MA15+ Available: Now

**C**all of Duty is a shining example of the fact that a game doesn't need to do anything new or innovative to be an amazingly captivating and accomplished experience. There's nothing in CoD that we haven't seen before, but it does everything so beautifully and on such a large scale that the end result is nothing short of a masterpiece.

If you're a fan of Band of Brothers, Enemy at the Gates or Saving Private Ryan, you'll instantly recognise the inspiration behind this game. Set during the final year of World War II, CoD allows you to fill the footrot infested boots of English, American and Russian troops. You'll immediately notice that each lends itself to a unique style of gameplay, and we're not just talking about the use of different accents for your squad mates. The American missions tend to be most similar to those seen in Medal of Honour; you're a member of the 101st Airborne division, clearing villages and bases with a squad of team mates and a healthy dose of firepower. Stealth is damned, the Yanks are just there to kick ass and take numbers. The British missions, being the civilised, gentlemanly warriors that they were, have a very different feel. Instead of being accompanied by a full squad of seven or eight gung ho soldiers who like

nothing better than to shoot the first Nazi two wonders into their crosshairs, you'll be taking the swift and silent approach as an SAS trooper, with only one or two Brits accompanying you, going on clandestine missions that usually involve blowing stuff up. Finally we have the poor old Russians.

If it sucked to be a soldier in WWII, it sucked to be a Russian the most. These guys took the brute force approach, throwing hundreds of troops directly into the firing line, many of whom didn't even have a weapon. One of the finest levels of the game is a Russian beach landing, and for the entirety of the mission you're armed with a single clip of bullets. No gun, just bullets. Sure, you could probably bludgeon to death the enemy with the bullet clip, but when they're shooting at you with automatic weaponry it's a little difficult to get close enough to do so. Making matters worse is the fact that if you start to retreat at all, you'll end up with a bullet in the forehead courtesy of your caring commanding officer. Retreat is simply not an option for the Russkis.

The 24 missions on offer are made up of a mixture of these three different forces, starting just as operation Overlord (the Normandy invasion) begins, and ending with the toppling of Berlin. There was rumoured to be a special fourth

campaign, but we didn't see anything out of the ordinary. Several of these levels are basically a total rip off of scenes from the aforementioned movies, but this is in no way bad thing, as playing through these levels is even more engrossing since you've got a reference point to identify with. While the missions are all suitably different from the rest, it would have been nice to have more of an intro and conclusion to each mission. As it is, the missions seem a little disjointed, with the player jumping between unrelated tasks, which is one of the only flaws of the entire game.

After chatting with the developers we expected a total game length of upwards of twenty five hours, but managed to play through the entire campaign in under ten. Granted, I was a bit of a quick save whore, using the F5 button almost as often as my firing button, but I did play it on the second hardest difficulty. Ten hours might not sound like much, but the first thing I did after completing the game was to fire it up once more on the hardest difficulty level, swearing an oath to myself not to touch the quick save button. That's got to be a good sign of how addictive this game is, as I never replay a game as soon as I've completed it. And while the game is quite linear with lots of

## SYSTEM

### NEED

Hardware T&L 3D card  
700MHz CPU  
128MB RAM  
DX9 compatible sound card

### WANT

1.7GHz or better CPU  
512MB RAM  
DirectX 9 compliant video card (9700 PRO or better)  
EAX compatible sound card

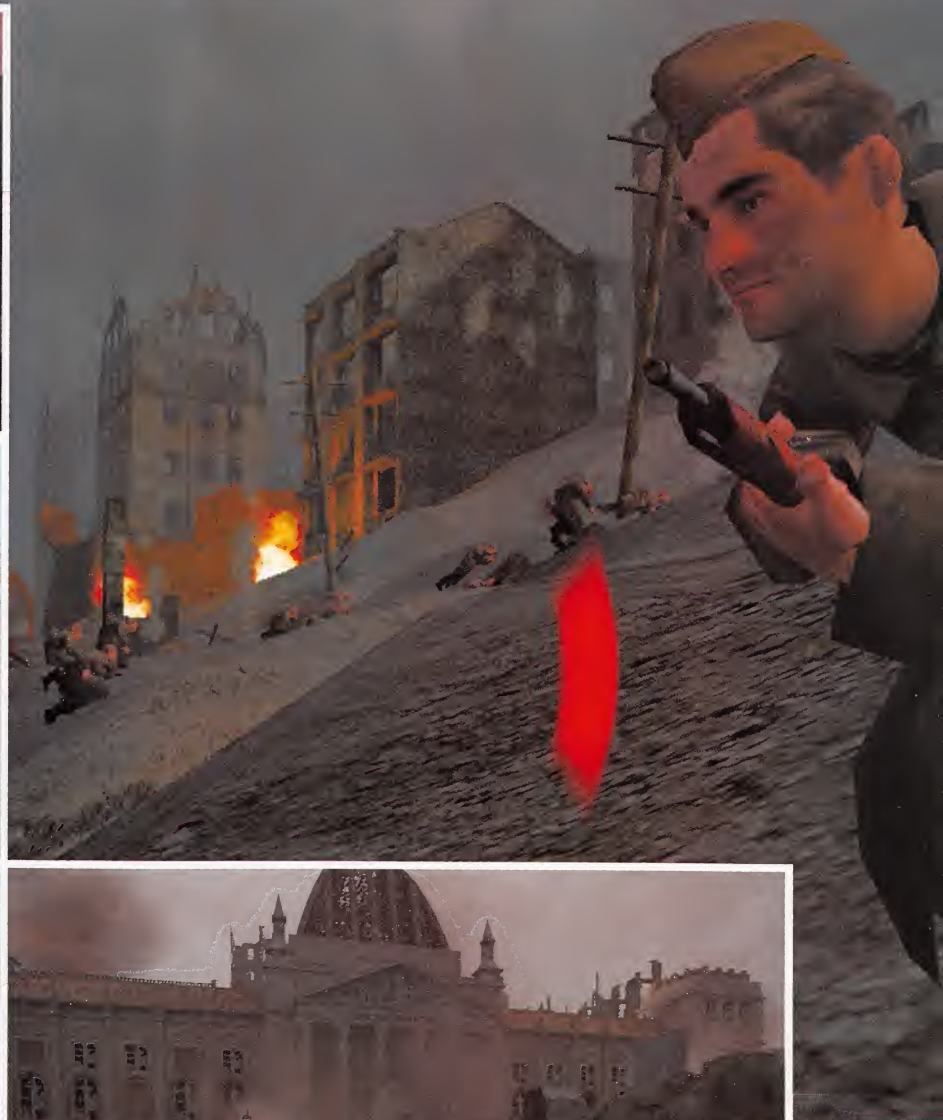
### MULTIPLAYER

32 player

### ONLINE

[www.callofduty.com](http://www.callofduty.com)  
— If you'd like to check out footage of the game in action, or download one of the two demos, head over to the official web site.





## YOU CAN NEVER HAVE ENOUGH SWASTIKAS

Many of the WWII shooters currently available are lacking any sign of Hitler's favourite symbol, the dreaded Swastika. So it was refreshing to see that the creators of CoD weren't too scared to upset certain territories, and gave the game a liberal dose of Swastika lovin'. Well done Infinity Ward, maybe EA will learn from you and stop altering history to make its own games more PC.

scripted scenes, the various branches through the levels combined with the unpredictability of the AI helps to make the game feel slightly different every time you play it. Now that I'm playing on the hardest difficulty without quick saves, I'd say the total game length has blown out to around 20 hours at least.

If there's something that stands out about the level design and the resulting gameplay, it's pacing and atmosphere. The devs have totally nailed both of these, which is testimony to the fact that they managed to get gameplay working a mere couple of months after starting work on the game. Over the top, insane, action-packed battle scenes are broken up nicely with quiet lulls in the combat, giving you a chance to get your breath back, and to

you don't), auto save points are located in perfect positions, usually just after a particularly gruelling section.

CoD uses a highly modified version of the Quake 3 Arena engine, but you'd be hard pressed to pick it. There are a couple of giveaways, such as a slightly blocky feel to some of the levels, but there is no doubt that CoD is one of the prettiest games currently available. This is even more remarkable considering that in certain scenes three hundred different character models are on screen at once, yet somehow the game runs very well on medium level systems. Lighting effects are especially noteworthy, with flak cannons lighting up their surrounding area and tracers whizzing around like hyperactive firecrackers, as are the bullet

help build up more suspense before the bullets start flying again. If you choose not to use the quick save feature (which I highly recommend

impact and explosion effects. And it's great to see a healthy splash of blood every time your lead package arrives at its destination.

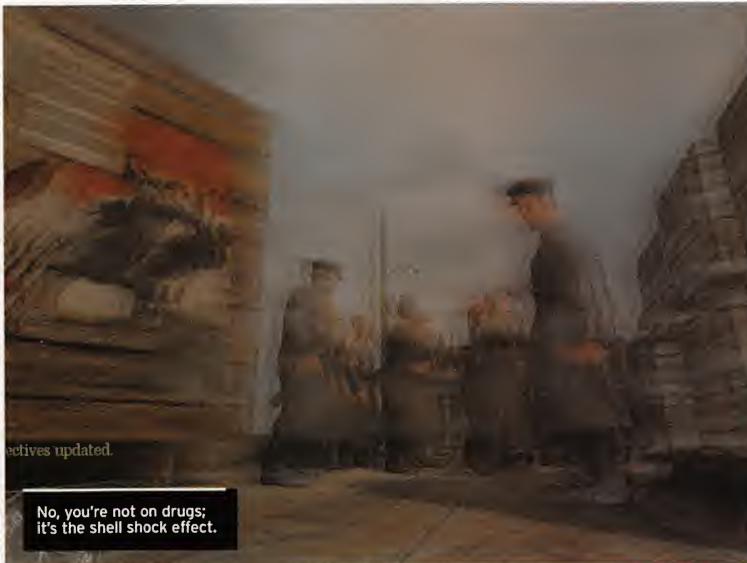
The majority of the levels are massive in scale, making even those in Battlefield 1942 look like a claustrophobic's worst nightmare. This leads to massive firefights with upwards of thirty soldiers battling it out at any one time, and there is plenty of stuff going on in the background, such as planes making strafing runs and clouds lighting up from flak fire, which help create an epic battlefield atmosphere.

While the game lacks a realistic

## DEVELOPERS DEVELOPERS DEVELOPERS

CoD was developed by over twenty of the guys behind MOHAA. But it's not an EA game. These guys left EA after MOHAA to form their own company, Infinity Ward, and CoD is their first game release. Based on our impressions of their debut title, this is a developer to keep a close eye on.





## DRIVER DILEMMAS

After firing up CoD on a RADEON 9800 PRO with the Catalyst 3.8 drivers, we were dismayed to see the game crash every few minutes, requiring a full reboot of the PC. Rewind to the 3.7 set and the shell shock special effects no longer worked. Same with the 3.6 drivers. Finally we got it all working ok with the 3.5 set, although character shadows were strangely absent. Expect a patch in the near future that fixes these issues.

actually hit the character model, and the end result is you'll need to be much more accurate with your shots.

physics system, this is more than made up for by the spectacular animations. Shoot a bad guy in the leg and he'll clutch at his wound, giving you a vital couple of seconds to polish him off with a well aimed headshot. If you're good enough to hit a guy on the run, you'll be rewarded with them stumbling to their feet mid-pace. Your team mates will vault over obstacles and through doors, and are smart enough to hit the dirt when the bullets start flying.

The sound effects in CoD are simply superb, raising the bar a notch above the impressive effects of MOHAA. You'll soon recognise the various sounds of the enemy guns, and the roar of an MG42 mounted machine gun spewing out 1800 rounds per minute will be a noise that you'll soon learn to fear. If we could fault anything, it's that the sound effects are a little overwhelming, drowning out the commands that your team leader continually shouts to you, making the use of subtitles a necessary evil.

It's nice to see that for once you're not the guy in charge of leading his comrades to their deaths. Instead you play the part of an average grunt, following orders from the powers that be. Thankfully the AI in CoD is some of the best we've ever seen in a shooter, so you don't need to worry about keeping your team mates alive. Both Allied and Axis AI will stay out of lines of fire, and will take cover when necessary. This makes the use of cover fire a very effective technique, as your squad will often lay

down a blanket of lead to cover your advance. Throw a grenade at one of the Germans and they'll often reach over to grab it and throw it back - provided you don't bust a cap in their gut in the process. The AI also understands flanking tactics, although this doesn't always work quite as smoothly as we'd like. While the AI is definitely a challenge on the harder levels, it never feels as if it's cheating, unlike the super snipers seen within MOHAA.

As far as gameplay goes, CoD is very similar to MOHAA but on a much larger scale, with a few nice additions. Most of the missions see you slugging it out on foot, but a couple have you riding shotgun in a car or truck, and you even get to drive a Russian tank through a couple of levels. Your soldier can crouch and go prone, which is handy when facing off against the dreaded MG42 nests, and you can also lean to the left and right to pop out from behind a piece of cover. When you really need your bullets to hit their mark, a quick tap of the right mouse button brings up your gun's iron sights, and you'll have to rely upon this mode if you want to make it all the way to Berlin.

One of the games finest new features is per poly hit detection. In past first person shooters each character model was encased in a couple of invisible hit boxes which were used to detect bullet strikes. This meant that a player could sometimes shoot a bullet just to the side of the character model and still register a hit. With per poly detection you must

It's a very subtle effect, but makes the game feel more realistic.

While we didn't get to try out the multiplayer modes, as the game hadn't been released, they certainly look promising. As well as the standard deathmatch and team deathmatch modes, there is Retrieval, Search and Destroy and Behind Enemy Lines. Retrieval and Search and Destroy are standard objective based modes, with one team defending and one attacking, while Behind Enemy Lines is a brand new game type that basically plays out like a game of hide and seek - with high powered weaponry of course. A couple of innovative camera modes are also included. The first of these shows the dead player the last five seconds of footage from the viewpoint of the person who killed them. There is also another camera view that shows the winning move of each round. Not only will these camera modes spice up the online gameplay, they'll also make it simple to spot people using cheats such as wall hacks.

CoD does everything so damn well that it can't help but be one of the finest first person shooters we've played in recent years, not to mention the most atmospheric. It's a little short, but chances are you're not going to stop playing the game just because you've completed it. Whether you're a first person shooter fan or a WWII buff, Call of Duty could turn out to be the gaming highlight of your Christmas.

Bennett Ring

## RATING



### FOR

Gorgeous graphics  
Oozes atmosphere  
Stunning AI

### AGAINST

Short campaign  
Heavily scripted

### OVERALL

CoD does everything gamers look for in a first person shooter, and does it beautifully. The single player shooter genre has a new benchmark.

# 94



# Max Payne 2

## The Fall of Max Payne

It's up to you New York, New York

Developer: Remedy ■ Publisher: Rockstar Games ■ Distributor: Take 2 Interactive ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

### SYSTEM

#### NEED

PIII 1.0GHz or equivalent  
256Mb RAM  
32Mb 3D Video Card  
1.7Gb HDD

#### WANT

P4 1.4GHz or equivalent  
512Mb RAM  
64MB DX9.0 compatible 3D Video Card  
1.7Gb HDD

#### MULTIPLAYER

No

#### ONLINE

[www.vachss.com](http://www.vachss.com)  
The official site for the world's grittiest crime writer and the creator of Bourke, a man even tougher and more driven than Max Payne, the inimitable Andrew Vachss.

**L**ike a perfect movie, Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne starts with a bang, the closing credits and accompanying ballad roll before it outstays its welcome and is, at its brooding and bloody heart, all about a girl. Following on from the tragic events of the first game, The Fall of Max Payne sees Max going back to his roots - a dingy bachelor's apartment and a job with the NYPD as a detective. Although Max received some closure at the end of his first adventure, things are still not well in the world of everyone's favourite hard-boiled, two-fisted lawman. Somehow Mona Sax, the literal femme fatale introduced in the original has resurfaced, with a bullet lodged in her brain and a score to settle, drawing Max back into the life he was so desperately trying to forget,



### LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI

Although throughout the review we've only referred to Max Payne himself, Max Payne 2 also features a number of levels are played as the lovely assassin Mona Sax. Although she is effectively just a female version of Max, passionate, violent and capable of triggering Bullet Time, Mona also comes equipped with a Druganov sniper rifle, a weapon that becomes the focus of what is perhaps the most well-scripted sequence in the game - Mona scrambling around the scaffolding on a construction site trying to get good lines of fire so she can cover Max trying to find an exit.

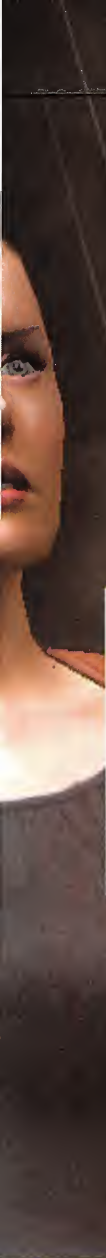


Max asks Mona if she wants to play Doctors and Nurses

bringing him back into the fold of his old friends and enemies, Vladimir Lem, Vinnie Gognitti, the Captain and the like. Not only is Mona back on the scene, stirring up some long dormant emotions in Max, a mysterious group of heavily armed criminals are systematically murdering members of the Illuminati-esque Inner Circle. Could the two events be connected? What do you think?

From the outset it's pretty obvious that The Fall of Max Payne isn't going to break any new ground, not that there's





I think it's time to call in the cleaner...



Looks like Max has a bullet lodged in his brain as well

## MAX VOLUME

It's hard to think about Max Payne without imagining the melodramatic voice acting and driving score. As could be expected, both return in the sequel as well as some nice and meaty weapon sounds and bullet hits. The soundtrack is about as close to being faultless as you're likely to find in a game. If anything the script is better written this time around, with Max coming off as a tortured avenger rather than an angst-ridden postmodernist like in the original. Gone are the rants about how unfair life is and everything can disappear in a New York minute, replaced instead with some wonderfully purple prose on the subject of love, loss and betrayal.

small army single-handedly. This may sound overly powerful but even on the basic difficulty you'll need all the help you can get.

The enemy AI isn't really the most intelligent in the world but it really doesn't need to be, as much like the original game, Max Payne 2 relies on complex and tense scripted sequences for the majority of important scenes. That said, even the basic grunts can cause some serious damage to our hero, as they rarely move alone, are quick on the draw and often come from multiple directions at once. At later levels the enemies also wear body armour, making them even tougher to take down quickly. The general level design is similar to the first game and much of it will be recognisable to fans of the first, both in form and function. The architectural centre-piece of the first game, Club Ragnarok makes a welcome return, this time in the guise of Vodka, a ritzy restaurant built in the blasted shell of the original building. Aside from familiar locations, Max Payne 2 features another escape through fire (though not nearly as frustrating as the first) and some truly creepy dream sequences. Don't worry, this time around the dreams don't feature any endless mazes or instant death jumps, instead offering players a real glimpse of Max's twisted psyche.

The original Max Payne engine drives Max Payne 2, though you'd hardly know it, as the game is easily one of the best, if not the best looking game on the market at the moment. Although the character models aren't too dissimilar to those seen in the original game, the faces and animations are absolutely top notch. The rendered graphic novel cut-scenes return,

giving the game a feeling of familiarity and noirish gravitas. Although the models look great, the real stars of the show are the intricate textures and effects ranging from spectacular landscapes to explosions. Another impressive aspect is the inclusion of the Havok 2.0 physics engine originally slated for debut in Half-Life 2. Rather than relying on motion capture for death animations or spectacular explosions, Remedy has simply plugged in the physics engine and let it go to work, the results of which are nothing short of spectacular. Every object or model, from enemy mooks to office chairs have been instilled with weight and inertia lending an added sense of realism to the proceedings. Bodies jerk realistically as bullets slam into them and piles of boxes tumble as you dive in dramatic slow motion - it really has to be seen to be believed.

Although the labyrinthine plot can simply be garnered through the cut-scenes, players who explore and interact with the environment will have a far more enjoyable time. Much of the back-story and motivation for the peripheral characters can be discovered through eavesdropping on conversations or listening to answering machines. The television shows screening on the various sets throughout the game are also worthy of mention. Aside from the continuing adventures of Captain Baseball Bat Boy, the two main shows - Dick Justice and Address Unknown - function as mirrors to the action seen in the game. Dick Justice plays like a blaxploitation parody of the events of the first game, whereas Address Unknown shows a man's descent into madness after he wakes up to find himself in Noir York, a post-Lynchian by way of Cronenberg nightmare world after a killer claiming to be him steals his identity - a plot very similar to some of Max's own fractured self image. We can't wait to see what Max has in store for us when he continues his journey into the night.

Daniel Wilks

## RATING



## FOR

Looks Amazing  
Bullet Time  
Satisfying

## AGAINST

Short  
Some clipping problems  
Nothing revolutionary

## OVERALL

If you weren't a fan of the original game there isn't much to hook you into playing Max Payne 2 but for everyone else, be prepared for one of the tensest, best scripted and just downright satisfying shooters to come along in ages.

# 89

much ground left that wasn't covered in the first game, essentially making a bigger, badder, meaner and considerably better looking follow on. Naturally the most important aspect of Max Payne - Bullet Time - is back with a few little tweaks that make using it a whole new experience. Shoot-dodging no longer utilises any of the bullet time hourglass, effectively giving Max unlimited use of the skill. Another nice little tweak is that Max will remain on the ground after a dive as long as he keeps shooting, making him a far more difficult target to hit. Although the general time slowing effect of Bullet Time returns, this time around it comes with an added bonus - each enemy Max kills not only regenerates the amount of Bullet Time left, but also speeds up Max's movement speed. After a couple of kills the meter turns yellow, allowing Max to move at nearly normal speed, allowing him to literally take on a





# XIII

Man it would suck being called number I or number II

Developer: Ubi Soft Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Distributor: Ubi Soft ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

## SYSTEM

### NEED

P4 1GHz or equivalent  
128Mb RAM  
32Mb 3D Video Card  
2.5Gb HDD

### WANT

P4 2.0GHz or equivalent  
256Mb RAM  
64Mb 3D Video Card  
2.5Gb HDD

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### ONLINE

[www.trueconspiracies.com](http://www.trueconspiracies.com)  
An online resource documenting all of the "true" conspiracies that we run afoul of every day. Damn the Gnomes of Zurich, damn them to hell!

**I**t's often the case in game development that style outweighs substance - when something looks cool gameplay is usually fairly run of the mill. Unreal 2 showed us this with an amazing engine but with fairly mundane level design and gameplay. Utilising the same Unreal Warfare engine, XIII delivers up absolutely bucket loads of style but also doesn't skimp on the substance, offering up some excellent tactical combat, lashings of tense stealth and some great multiplayer to boot. Based on a long running Belgian comic series, XIII details the story of an amnesiac soldier, surgically altered to look like the titular XIII, a member of a super-secretive conspiracy with members ranging from I to XX. Throughout the events of the game, the faux XIII slowly pieces together the conspiracy in what is one of the most detailed and engrossing plots we've ever seen in a first-person shooter and quite rightly so - the comic series has been running for years so there's one hell of a lot of source material to draw from.

Although relatively short, the single player campaign features around 20 big, well-designed levels with locations including an Alpine villa, a mental institution, a cable-car station, FBI base and hidden paramilitary installation. Although not a great deal, there is some

leniency in the way players can tackle the levels, negating the all too common feeling in FPS games that you're being led around by a big brass ring freshly planted in your nose. Enemy AI is excellent throughout and features a nice suspicion gauge kind of like Hitman 2 - if an enemy spots something suspicious you have a second or two to hide before he'll decide to investigate. The only real flaw in the level design is the boss battles. Due to the real world setting of the game, boss battles are limited to fighting super-tough soldiers - a gimmick that just doesn't seem to ring true. Luckily they only appear on a handful of levels so you don't have to worry too much.

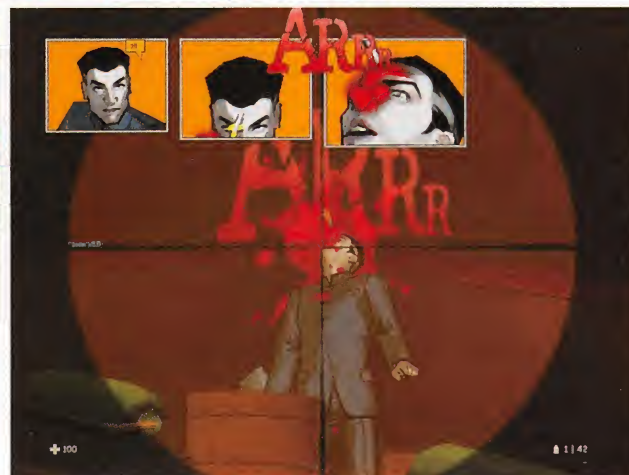
If multiplayer is your bag then XIII will surely please as it offers up all of the standard gameplay modes as well as a few very entertaining extras. All of the maps are based around levels in the single player campaign so you know they're big, complex and full of secret passages and air ducts. Aside from the standards like deathmatch and team deathmatch, XIII features two "exclusive" game modes called Sabotage and Power-Up. Sabotage plays something like the bomb maps in Counter-Strike but each map features three points at which explosives must be placed instead of just one. Power-Up is great if you're looking

for a quick action fix. Though basically just a deathmatch style game, Power-Up does away with the standard weapon spawn points, instead replacing them with anonymous boxes that contain randomised weapons, armour, ammo and miscellaneous abilities such as short term invisibility or invulnerability. Sure it's about as deep as a puddle but if you're looking for a quick frag you could go a lot further wrong. All of the multiplayer modes support bots and we're pleased to report that the bot AI is actually very good, giving you a challenging match even if you can't find an opponent online.

## It's official, cel-shading is the new lens flare

A quick note to any developer looking to utilise cel-shading in any upcoming game: take a look at XIII to see how it's done properly. Ubi Soft has managed to create the perfect looking comic book game with a combination of excellent flat-shaded characters, thick "inked" outlines, on screen onomatopoeia and a very clever use of panelling to display special events. Aside from being shaded in broad swathes of colour to give them a flat, comic book look, all of the models from people to weapons to vehicles are surrounded by a thick black outline highly reminiscent of the inking seen in





## GUNS AND AMMO

Although all of the weapons in XIII have their definite uses ranging from the standard knife all the way up to the M60 heavy machine gun, all of them pale in comparison to the crossbow, one of the best and coolest weapons to have appeared in a FPS in a while. Although only a single shot weapon, the crossbow features a long zoom and is totally silent, perfect for picking off enemies without alerting them to your presence. It also shows the coolest headshot panel with the bolt protruding from the mook's face in all its bloody glory.

Ubisoft hasn't forgotten the old amnesia plot device trick

a number of comic books, further cementing the fact that XIII is a graphic novel brought to life. Footsteps and other off-screen noises are often displayed as onomatopoeia - a succession of gradually growing "tap, tap, tap" to signal an enemy moving closer or a huge "BANG!" to signal an off-screen kill. Aside from deepening the comic book atmosphere, the visualisation of many sounds adds to

the stealth elements of the game as you can monitor movement patterns by looking for the sounds of the various enemies and work out the timing from that. The cleverest and also the most annoying

feature of the comic book look of the game is the use of pop-up panels displaying special events. Panels often herald enemies approaching or plot specific events but also appear when you achieve a headshot or make someone fall off a high ledge. Whilst seeing three panels showing the shot from different angles is very cool the first few times, when they start appearing in the thick of combat, obscuring part of the screen and making it impossible to see some enemies for a few seconds they become very frustrating.

Fresh from his triumphant career of doing nothing of note since leaving The X-Files, David Duchovny lends his voice to XIII and sounds just about perfect, mixing the world weary cynicism, incredulity and naïve wonder we came to love in Fox Mulder to the character. It works a treat. All of the voice acting is of a very high standard and the sound effects are great as well.

If there is any gripe to be had with XIII it's that aside from the graphics it really does nothing new, treading the now familiar pathways seen in nearly every modern shooter - some strategic action with some stealth (this year stealth is the new black) thrown in for good measure. Sure it treads these paths in a very self-assured manner, but in the ten or so hours it will take you to finish the single player campaign there's nothing apart from the eye candy that will rock you back in your chair or mutter a delightfully shocked expletive under your breath. Aside from this relatively minor gripe, XIII is a great and superbly stylish shooter sure to appeal to anyone looking for a fix of impressively plotted action.

Daniel Wilks



## RATING



## FOR

Looks incredible  
Solid multiplayer  
Good AI

## AGAINST

Nothing new  
Boss battles  
Short

## OVERALL

Do yourself a favour and grab a copy of XIII and discover the roots of the conspiracy for yourself.

# 86





# Enigma: Rising Tide

A naval sim for the rest of us

Developer: Tesseract Games ■ Publisher: Auran Games ■ Distributor: Auran Games ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

## SYSTEM

### NEED

PIII 750Mhz CPU  
256MB RAM  
32MB DirectX Video Card  
750MB HDD

### WANT

1Ghz CPU  
512MB RAM  
64MB DirectX Video Card

### MULTIPLAYER

No

### ONLINE

[www.goonie.com](http://www.goonie.com)  
Find some crazy website yourself, you lazy bastard.

## RATING



### OVERALL

A decent naval sim with a focus on fast-paced fun rather than realism.

# 74

**M**oving against the recent trend towards greater complexity in naval sims, developer Tesseract Games has produced a terrific game that places the emphasis squarely on fun and action. Enigma: Rising Tide has just enough realism to claim more than simple arcade status, and the nicely developed storyline will keep players coming back for another crack at those elusive capital ships. Alternative realities are all the rage at the moment, so Tesseract has joined the push with a decent back-story that sees the Germans on top in WWII while Britain and Japan work together to regain lost glory ñ with the US waiting menacingly in the wings.

Rising Tide is a bare-bones title that brings a solid training mode, some basic patrol-style missions and a campaign for each of the key factions. Multiplay is missing but promised for the future, and a random mission generator is nowhere to be seen. Despite the cut-down approach, players will be pleased with the general pace of the game and the relative depth of the campaigns, which are supported by

## INTERFACE IS EVERYTHING!

You don't need to be an admiral to drive Rising Tide, thanks to a very basic and generic control system. The Big Tactical Display (B-Tac) summarises the input from all ship's sensors, provides information on contacts and allows the plotting of waypoints. Other visual indicators show the ship's status, including depth, speed and heading, and a simple schematic shows all weapon points and the ship's fuel and hull status. It works well in a game that steers towards arcade-style action, but some veterans will doubtless be disappointed with the small number of dials they get to twirl.

basic but sufficient mission briefings and a rudimentary attempt at scene-setting. As a result, Rising Tide is well suited to both long gaming sessions and short bursts of aquatic action - without the need to revise a three hundred page manual every time you jump in.

Players commence the game in command of a single submarine or surface combatant, working their way through missions and larger commands until they have their own little fleet to play with. Patrol missions can be played as any faction, and they get progressively tougher as the game develops. Successful patrol skippers can advance in rank, but their new status won't

carry over to the campaigns. The campaigns are well handled, with a decent mix of missions and the chance to earn long-term promotion. The campaign factional stories are held together by basic briefings and regular news round-ups. It all works well enough, but don't expect the complex and immersive experience we've grown used to in recent years.

Rising Tide is an easy game to come to grips with, thanks to the use of generic control interfaces for all vessels and the lack of high technology weapons and combat systems. Players can either command from the bridge or jump to most stations - including guns, anti-aircraft cannon, depth charges and torpedoes - and take care of things personally. The interface is as intuitive as it gets and the simplified tactical display means that situational awareness is high at all times. The action gets pretty intense once big guns and aircraft get involved, but Rising Tide's control system manages it all very well. Just about everything can be set to automatic, but it's much more fun to jump on in.

The graphics and special effects in Rising Tide are surprisingly good for a relatively low-cost title, with decent ship and aircraft models, solid water effects and excellent explosions. Air attacks are particularly well done, boasting loud noises, stacks of sea spray and terrific damage modelling. Even so, things can get a little repetitive on long missions, and the lack of multiplay or a mission generator takes its toll after a while. Those two additions would make Enigma: Rising Tide an excellent title, but it's not too bad as it currently stands. If nothing else, it should attract some new players to the naval combat genre.

Des McNicholas



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Ego

Damage	Misc
Experience From 1 Combat Session	
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Ego Information

Sort by:	CR	Hit Dice
	<b>Brigand</b> CR: 1 Hit Dice: 1 AC: 13 Alignment: Chaotic Neutral # Killed: 4 First Killed - Day: 16 Month: 4 Last Killed - Day: 16 Month: 4	
	<b>Green Slime</b> CR: 1 Hit Dice: 2 AC: 8 Alignment: True Neutral # Killed: 4 First Killed - Day: 19 Month: 4 Last Killed - Day: 19 Month: 4	
	<b>Ghoul</b> CR: 1 Hit Dice: 2 AC: 14 Alignment: Chaotic Evil # Killed: 4 First Killed - Day: 19 Month: 4 Last Killed - Day: 19 Month: 4	
	<b>Gnoll</b> CR: 1 Hit Dice: 2 AC: 18 Alignment: Chaotic Evil # Killed: 4 First Killed - Day: 19 Month: 4 Last Killed - Day: 19 Month: 4	
	<b>Zombie</b> CR: 0 Hit Dice: 2 AC: 11 Alignment: True Neutral # Killed: 4 First Killed - Day: 15 Month: 4 Last Killed - Day: 19 Month: 4	

# Temple of Elemental Evil

In AD&D, temple is synonymous for dungeon

Developer: Troika Publisher: Atari ■ Distributor: Atari ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

## SYSTEM

### NEED

PIII 700Mhz or equivalent  
128Mb RAM  
16Mb 3D Video Card  
1.1Gb HDD

### WANT

P4 1.7GHz or equivalent  
256Mb RAM  
62Mb 3D Video Card  
1.1Gb HDD

### MULTIPLAYER

???

### ONLINE

www.wizards.com  
Download all of the changes between Editions 3 and 3.5 so you know what you're in for rules wise.

Unless you're a fan of pen and paper AD&D, the world of Greyhawk may be an unfamiliar setting, as pretty much all of the previous PC games based on the incredibly popular roleplaying franchise have been set in the far better known Forgotten Realms. If you are unfamiliar with the setting, never fear, with the exception of some different gods and new towns, anyone who has ever played a CRPG will feel right at home with Troika's Temple of Elemental Evil, a game that hits most of the familiar genre marks with ease - challenging combat, tons of sub-quests, evil monsters and an evil plot to destroy all that is good in the world.

Although similar to the character creation in the recent Neverwinter Nights and Icewind Dale 2, Temple is the first CRPG to utilise the new 3.5 Edition AD&D rules set. Although not a great deal has changed between the 3 and 3.5 editions, players would be advised to actually read the manual for a change as little information is given during levelling up for different feats and skills. Misspent experience can reduce what was once a great character into nothing more than a mule, good for carrying equipment and little else. Players are initially given the option to create up to five characters to make up their party, first choosing an overall alignment for all of the characters

that defines what classes, specific alignments, the starting point of the party and some of the optional quests that become available. Whilst it feels a little cumbersome at first, having to choose an overall alignment to begin the game is a great mechanic for gameplay balance, ensuring that players can't simply choose a bunch of characters and carry on however they like - it's impossible to have both a Paladin and any evil person in the party (including NPC characters) without the Paladin losing all of her abilities. After choosing the alignment, players can create characters from all of the standard AD&D races and classes. Once in game, character control utilises a radial menu system similar to that used in Neverwinter Nights but umpteen degrees more complex.

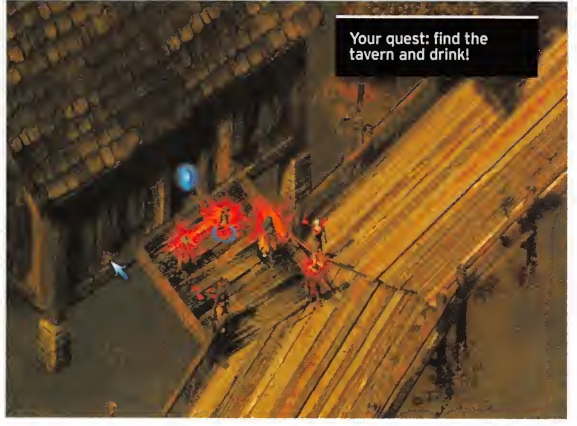
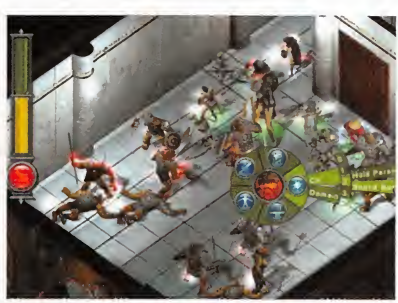
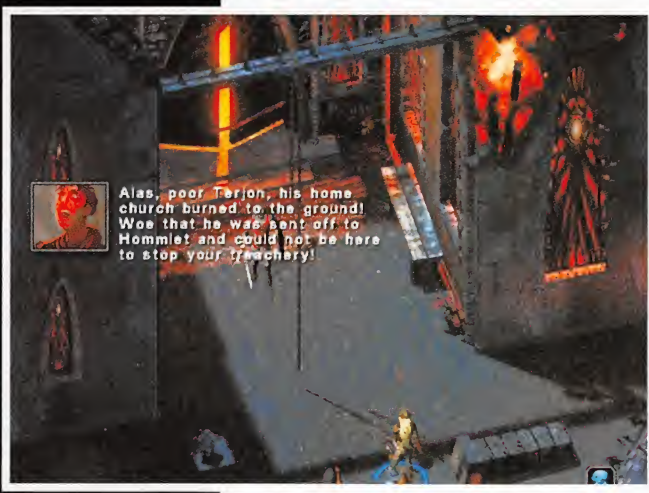
## Help Wanted

Though you can create up to five characters, the player can actually hire a number of NPC characters to supplement their skills, up to a maximum of eight characters in the party. There are a number of NPCs to hire throughout the game ranging from simple 1st-level fighters all the way through to 10th-level mages. Unfortunately there are some serious flaws to the NPC AI that really need to be fixed to make them

worthwhile, namely the pathfinding and treasure acquisition scripting. The pathfinding for the NPC characters is at times woeful, with characters frequently becoming stuck behind terrain features or simply refusing to follow the party. Although this is very annoying it pales in comparison to the way that most of the NPCs collect treasure. Whenever you hire a character there is a certain share of the treasure that goes to them. This may sound like a fair deal but when an NPC picks up a +2 Staff of Striking as their 1/8th share and leaves you with a few copper coins in exchange, you can't help but feel like killing the little bugger on the spot. To make things worse, many of the NPC characters will just keep automatically picking up items until they are so encumbered they can't actually move - this wouldn't be so bad if you could manage their inventories, but unfortunately as soon as something goes in they will not let you take it out again except to sell it, at which point the items and money you would normally get for them simply disappear into the ether.

Temple of Elemental Evil utilises the now familiar pre-rendered backgrounds and quasi-3D characters we have come to know and love in RPGs, but ups the ante by including some of the best character/monster animations and spell





## GET IT RIGHT

OK - this is just a little bitch but it irks me when people name things wrong, especially when the mistake shows up so frequently. Troika constantly refers to the case for crossbow bolts as a quarrel when in fact quarrel is another name for a crossbow bolt (or two or more arbalests, but that's another story entirely). The modern meaning of the word quarrel, to argue, comes from the act of firing a crossbow bolt (or quarrel) at an enemy. I'm glad that's all cleared up.

NPC characters it's quite obvious that Troika was aiming at creating some fairly memorable characters, ranging from a nagging wife that one of the characters has the option to marry to an ambiguously gay pirate or an alcoholic mercenary. Whereas the great NPC characters of the past (such as Minsc or Deekin) had genuinely lovable personalities and great dialogue, the NPCs in Temple of Elemental Evil seem to be only the most cursory of caricatures with only one or two phrases each, both of which are usually pretty lame. Hearing the nagging wife character scream, "Don't tell me what to do...OK, I'll do it" every time you try to give an order in combat becomes more than a little grating.

Probably the single greatest flaw of Temple of Elemental Evil is the module upon which the game is based. Sure the old AD&D module may be considered a

classic but think of it this way - you'll often hear about the classic comedies of Jerry Lewis. It becomes obvious pretty quickly that unless you're French, classic in this sense does not necessarily mean good. When push comes to shove, the original module of Temple of Elemental Evil is little more than a dungeon hacking Monty-haul, consisting of nothing more than nearly endless combat interspersed with item collection. Add this to the number of bugs and stability issues the game has shipped with and you have a fairly problematic release. Ultimately the new game from Troika follows the same path (albeit with far more sub quests), pitting the heroes against an almost endless horde of enemies that range from challenging to downright nasty. Unfortunately the game lacks the kind of narrative impetus that drove most of the previous AD&D titles, sometimes making the near constant though fun combat feel more like a chore than the next vital step in achieving your goal. With any luck there should be a patch sometime in the near future that will assuage many of the problems, allowing all us RPG fans to get the most out of Troika's latest offering.

Daniel Wilks

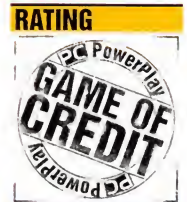
Ah, the Repository of Useless Information +3

effects we've yet seen in an RPG. Character movement and attacks are absolutely spot on, giving the proceedings a nice and flowing look. Even more impressive are the myriad spell effects - aside from simply looking flashy, many of the spells dynamically light the area, affecting the surrounding shadows or casting patterns on walls. Whilst the music is generally quite good, if somewhat generic fantasy in nature, the voice acting leaves a little something to be desired. From the personalities of the



## DIRECTOR'S CUT

There is a rumour that before they would release Temple of Elemental Evil, Atari forced Troika to excise a number of elements from the game that would bump up the rating, making it difficult to get the game into some of the larger retail chains in the United States. The excised parts are said to include a brothel and a number of evil quests, including assassination and drug trafficking. Considering that many of the Troika team worked on Fallout, the idea that the game may have at one stage contained a number of socially unacceptable elements is a fairly believable one. With any luck Troika may release an official patch at some stage to restore some of the game's lost flavour.



**FOR**  
Challenging  
Spell effects  
Some great quests

**AGAINST**  
Dull NPCs  
Buggy  
Poor pathfinding

**OVERALL**  
Temple of Elemental Evil is sure to appeal to all RPG gamers - just make sure to read the manual and find a patch before you begin to play.

71





# Tiger Woods 2004

I doubled-bogeyed my birdie's eagle

Developer: EA Sports ■ Publisher: EA Sports ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

## SYSTEM

### NEED

P3-700  
64MB RAM  
32MB Video card  
750MB HDD

### WANT

P4-1GHz+  
256MB RAM  
GeForce3  
1.4GB HDD

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### ONLINE

[www.golflife.com](http://www.golflife.com)  
Because the only thing better than golf is amusing golf-themed gifts and novelties. Words like 'zany', 'mapcap', 'wacky' and 'outrageous' abound. Indeed, it's the "funniest golf on the web".

## RATING



### OVERALL

Golfing at its best, with plenty of extras

89

**S**o now, a golf game. Historically, these have not been the epitome of PC-based entertainment, what with their static environments, awkwardly motion-captured players, variable ball physics and general stodginess. Golf games, typically, were for golf lovers, not gamers.

Before I start to explain how this one is different, let me clear the air by saying golf lovers will love Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004, since the game models every niggly little golfy detail you could ever possibly want plus has real 3D courses that move smoothly and fluidly, allowing for all the 'dramatic' camera angles you freaks have come to demand from your exhaustive 24-hour Masters tour TV coverage.

## Tee off

Meanwhile, surprisingly the game also works well for the average gamer who, like every wit before them, thinks of golf

as nothing more than a spoilt walk.

EA has been very clever in designing the game, balancing the player's need to hit the ball properly with the selected golfer character's set of statistics. This basically means that if you select Tiger Woods in the Casual Round screen (he's the default character) you will be able to score mostly pars and birdies even on the first time you play the game.

The TruSwing club action system pioneered by earlier games has been further refined and now simply involves holding down the left button, pulling the mouse back and then pushing it forward. If your action is mostly straight and your movement is mostly smooth, the club will make good contact with the ball and your shot will soar impressively down the fairway. Fiddling with the action of the mouse can produce slices, curves and crazy wobbly shots that seem almost drawn to bunkers.

What's great about the game is that unlike many other golf sims, you really can play it for five minutes between important engagements, ie your next CS ladder match. While clicking compulsively on the various menu buttons will quickly funnel you to a casual round, you can also tweak almost

every aspect of the match, play as little as a single hole, try driving or chipping contests, or just go for a practice belt by your own self.

## Above par

For the player who wants to invest a bit more time in the game, there's the requisite career mode. After designing your player (see boxout), you can spend cash on upgrading various attributes such as putting, recovery, long game, short game in the vain hope of becoming skilled enough to reach the amateur leagues.

Then it's on to the main career menu to choose from various competitions, world tours and random challenges in an attempt to win cash and 'potential attributes' to further upgrade your player. And so it goes until eventually you're a master playing a PGA tour against the big TW himself.

Dozens of little touches such as sponsorship deals giving you bonus cash if you win while wearing your sponsor's label abound, and the final result is a fun, vibrant game that feels less like the stodginess of golf and more like the adrenalin-pumped carnivals atmosphere of the NBA.

And all that's just the singleplayer. Go online and take it to those yankee bastards on EA's servers, although they do actually expect you to pay for the privilege. Fortunately, the game comes with a 'bonus card' that gives you a month of free play to decide whether or not it's actually worth the continued expense.

The bottom line? Put it like this: I hate golf, and this is the game I've clocked up the most hours on this month. Even if you've never hacked divots out of the back nine of your local, give this a try. It's a fun game.

Anthony Fordham







# Freedom Fighters

Damn Communists

Developer: IO Interactive ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

**W**here the hell did this game come from? Until it arrived all nice and boxed up in the PCPP bunker we'd heard little, if anything at all about the title. Usually that happens when a distributor or publisher is embarrassed about a title and wants to let it creep onto shelves without us nasty reviewing types getting our grubby little hands on it. The fact that EA doesn't seem to have put any effort into the promotion of Freedom Fighters (or Tron 2.0 for that matter, but that's another story) is an absolute crime as it's a fantastic little game and well deserving of far more publicity than it has been given.

Set in an alternate timeline in which Russia developed an atomic bomb before the Americans and dropped it on Germany, prematurely ending the war and making it the world's leading superpower, Freedom Fighters casts the player as the everyman plumber, Christopher Stone, unwillingly thrown into the role of hero when Russia first annexes and later invades American soil. It's up to Christopher and a handful of other American loyalists to slowly take back their country and strike a blow against the despotic Soviet block in a series of continually more complex raids and guerrilla style actions.

The hardest thing for the developers of squad-based first-person shooters to do is find a good balance between action and tactical combat, but IO Interactive has effortlessly combined the two. Initially Christopher is a solitary hero, a lone wolf playing by his own rules or some such action cliché. Once he has achieved a few objectives, however, Christopher gains points in charisma, an attribute that allows him to start actively leading up to 12 other freedom fighters into battle. Instead of relying on an overly complex command structure, players are only able



to deliver three basic commands, fall back, recon (or attack depending on the situation) and defend. The lack of a deeper command system does not hinder the game in any way - quite the opposite in fact, leaving the action readily accessible whilst still making it possible to lead from behind, using your AI team mates to do the lion's share of the work. Nearly all of the missions in Freedom Fighters take a very non-linear route - you can choose to do missions in any order (though the order in which they are undertaken can effect the other missions on the level) and once in the missions players can tackle the objectives in any order they so desire. Nearly all of the levels are set in large urban environments so there is a lot of opportunity to explore, snipe from windows or search for hidden caches of

## QUIBBLES

Whilst Freedom Fighters is great for the most part there are a few quibbles that keep it from being a must have, most notably spawning enemies and a tricky and rather annoying save system. Much of the combat in Freedom Fighters takes the form of taking out Russian blockades but often you will find that after killing all of the enemies in the area you'll suddenly be assailed by a hail of gunfire emanating from a soldier who has suddenly appeared from a previously empty area, often killing you before you have a chance to react. This wouldn't be so bad if the save system wasn't so tricky - players need to find a manhole to quick save, an action that often seems to spontaneously respawn all the enemies on the level, negating the use of the save in the first place.



weapons. The levels also look great with some nice textures and great looking destructible vehicles. Character models are generally very good as well but some more effort to give some variation between the Russian soldiers would have been nice.

Daniel Wilks

## SYSTEM

### NEED

PIII 733MHz or equivalent  
128Mb RAM  
32Mb 3D Vide

### WANT

P4 1.5GHz or equivalent  
256Mb RAM  
64Mb 3D Video Card

### MULTIPLAYER

No

### ONLINE

<http://usfi.com/>  
Check out the freaky rantings of a real life "freedom fighter", fresh from the United States of Gun Culture. If you can work out what he's trying to say with his insane mix of gratuitous quotes and rhetoric, let us know.

## RATING



### OVERALL

Excellent urban squad based shooting action that deserves far more effort from its distributors.

82





# Chrome

Who the hell is that guy and what the hell happened to his face.

Developer: Techland Publisher: Take 2 Interactive ■ Distributor: Take 2 Interactive ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

## SYSTEM

### NEED

PIII 800MHz or equivalent  
256Mb RAM  
32Mb 3D Video Card  
1.7Gb HDD

### WANT

P4 2.0GHz or equivalent  
512Mb RAM  
64Mb 3D Video Card  
1.7Gb HDD

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### ONLINE

[www.privateland.com/flash/elements.html](http://www.privateland.com/flash/elements.html)

Watch the flash animation of Tom Lehrer's classic song, The Elements, and learn. And you thought education couldn't be fun.

**C**hrome is one of those frustratingly schizophrenic games, jumping from inspired genius at one moment to utter crap the next. Although there is a definite plot to the game and I usually like to begin a review by detailing the reason for the action, the script for Chrome is so run of the mill that you'll end up paying it about as much attention as, say, the follicle mites that live in your eyebrows - ie. none (though a couple of you will probably now look at you eyebrows with a new sense of repulsion). This is but one of the examples where the game falls flat. Fortunately Techland has also managed to pack enough good stuff into the game to make it very playable for the most part and actually pretty good at others. Confused yet? In some preview or PR spiel, some clever spin-doctor labelled Chrome as being like a cross between Deus Ex and Counter-Strike, a tagline that has since stuck and intrigued/annoyed in equal measure. Unfortunately it is kind of true, as Chrome attempts to combine the inventory and implant based elements of Deus-Ex with the tactical combat of Counter-Strike - just don't get too excited by the idea as the final product can't hold a candle to either of the games to which it's so frequently compared.

Action takes place across 14 large levels ranging from lush forests to

futuristic space stations with the player charging about, shooting everything in sight and occasionally jumping in a vehicle to do a little off-roading. That's about it. Throughout the 20 or so hours it will take you to finish Chrome there's little in the way of variation. Luckily the game itself is challenging with the AI reacting fairly well for the most part and a good array of weapons to pick up and experiment with. Generally, the inventory and implant systems in Chrome are well



implemented but there are a few flaws or oversights that are sure to frustrate. Limiting the number of weapons and other pieces of equipment is a good move on behalf of the developers but access to the weapons you do have is clumsy at best. Instead of being able to set each weapon to a specific hotkey, Chrome keys all weapons of a type to one button,







Full marks to the facility's gardener

forcing the player to cycle through their inventory rather than being able to instantly choose. Implants on the other hand are keyed through use of the number pad, making their use an absolute breeze, though it is a bit annoying to have to take a hand off the mouse to trigger one. The implants, such as better aim or armour, run off what is essentially a rechargeable battery forcing the player to use them strategically.

## Nature Lover

When we first started seeing screens and hearing talk about Chrome we were lead



Talk about covering your arse

## HACKING

One of the things that Techland has managed to implement just right is the hacking that you'll have to undertake during the game. Instead of simply showing a skill progress bar or the like to show the hack at work, Chrome makes players to take part in a game of memory to complete the hack. Players only have a set number of moves to uncover every card, failure to do so resetting the hack and forcing players to do it all again.

to expect that it would be one of the first, if not the first DX9 game, utilising all the new bells and whistles to deliver quality the likes of which we had never seen before. Whilst some areas of the game look great, the graphics follow the same bi-polar route as the rest of the game, bringing delight and disappointment in equal measure. The first mission drops Logan in the middle of a vast outdoor map, starting the proceedings on a high note. All of the outdoor locations across the single player campaign look fantastic and give the player a great chance to explore and admire the sights. The first level also illustrates the worst part of the level design/look of the game - the indoor environments, a series of dull, drab and painfully linear corridors that seem to simply be recycled time and time again with a different paint job.

While we're on the subject of painful design, what the hell happened to the character models? More precisely, what the hell happened to their faces? They look like the after photos you see on tabloid TV shows about plastic surgery gone bad with their perfectly smooth skin and mouths that make them look like they have a little too much fish in their ancestry. On a lighter note, the physics engine and ragdolling lead to some very amusing moments, as the character models seem to have all of the weight and density of cork or maybe balsa wood. Shooting any enemy at anything closer than extreme long (sniper) range will result in them dramatically cartwheeling through the air like the action was choreographed by someone who once saw a John Woo film and thought it was pretty cool but didn't realise that moderation, not excess, is the key to a lasting impression of style.

Jon St. John, the man behind the voice of Duke Nukem lends his voice acting "talents" to Logan, the sour faced protagonist of the piece, giving him an



A comfy chair for the lazy marine

eerie sense of familiarity. It also gives the impression that St. John must have gone broke waiting for a paycheck from Duke Nukem Forever so was forced to sell his unique vocal stylings to anyone willing to give him a few bucks for kibble. We'll give the script the benefit of the doubt and say that it has lost a lot in translation but that still doesn't excuse the performances from the voice acting crew. There's a saying in movies that bad performances are "phoned in". To say that would be giving the performances way too much credit - perhaps a better description of the quality of the voice acting would be to say that they are faxed in, or maybe even telexed. On the other hand the soundtrack and effects are quite good if somewhat commonplace. Vehicles sound quite good but a little more attention to weapon sounds would have been appreciated because as it stands some of the weapons sound a bit undernourished. Some meatier bullet hits would have been nice as well.

Daniel Wilks

## #CKING CAMPERS

Although the AI performs quite well for the most part there is one type of enemy that will have you pulling your hair out in frustration - the snipers. All of the snipers in Chrome have the nearly superhuman ability to acquire a target from half way across the map and hit you dead bang 75% of the time. To make matters worse, unless you have uncanny senses you'll have a hard time detecting where the shots are coming from, making finding cover and taking out the enemy something of a chore.

## RATING



### FOR

Outdoor environments  
Challenging Inventory

### AGAINST

Repetitive Indoor environments  
Uninspired

### OVERALL

Chrome isn't a bad game per se; it's just too unbalanced to be anything more than a brief diversion.

65





# Commandos 3

## Destination Berlin

It's like a game of chess - but with guns and grenades

Developer: Pyro Studios Publisher: Eidos ■ Distributor: Atari ■ Price: \$99.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

### SYSTEM

#### NEED

PIII 700 (1Ghz for multiplayer)  
128Mb RAM  
32Mb Videocard  
2Gb HDD space

#### WANT

2.0 Ghz+  
512Mb RAM  
128Mb Videocard

#### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

#### ONLINE

<http://www.berefs.com/>  
Want to be a bad-ass? Try a soft, French, hat.

**C**ommandos 3 is equal parts diabolical puzzle game and World War II movie-style romp. It's like unravelling a great knot of evil Nazi troop positions with half of the cast of the Dirty Dozen. Sure you have guns, bombs and even sniper rifles, but the most critical element of Commandos comes in watching the guard rotations, keeping an eye on their field of view and working out where the blind spots are, and slowly working backwards from there.

The puzzle feel is further hammered home by the very specific skills of each of your six characters. If you don't get your pieces in the right places you are going to have a lot of problems, since your Green Beret can't climb walls, your Thief can't set explosives and your Sniper can't make silent close-quarter kills.

That's not to say that this is dull as Sniper to Queen 4. The movie vibe instantly puts you in the mood to demolish the German war-effort single-handedly and the music and detailed backdrops all help you feel like you really are on the road to Berlin.

It's amazing how tense you can get hiding behind a pillar and waiting for a guard to turn away, knowing that if you don't move in the next five seconds a patrol will spot you. He's not turning quickly enough so you desperately try lob

some cigarettes into the corner of his vision, hoping that they'll distract him for a second so you can slip away. Then you have things like hiding bodies, planting remote bombs, impersonating officers and ordering Nazi guards out of position.

### Commando Raids

The single player missions are mainly the creep forward and unravel the Nazis from the edges type, but they are very cleverly designed. Just as you start getting the hang of luring guards into concealed areas to make secret kills, you run into missions where all of the lines of sight overlap and wherever you lure someone, there will be someone else watching. When you get the hang of elaborate plans to deal with this, you get thrown a mission where you have to get quick and dirty. The whole experience is marked by desperation and knowing that there's a very good chance that you've missed a single guard on patrol and at any given moment you'll be sent back to your last save.

There are three campaigns which come to about 12 missions (depending how you break them up). Stalingrad is all Enemy at the Gates, including big battles and desperate searches for a crack enemy sniper; Central Europe is all about stealth and trains and Normandy goes the full Saving-Private-Ryan monty.

The only real downside to the campaign missions is that there aren't more of them.

Pyro has estimated about 25 hours of campaign time but most of this padded out by the game's daunting difficulty and by trying to foster the 'perfect mission' syndrome.

Don't be surprised if you fall into a habit of making a successful kill and then hitting 'Quick Save'.

Getting through these missions first time is almost impossible. There are just so many guards (some of whom aren't immediately obvious), anti-personnel mines will catch you off guard and the AI isn't stupid if you are foolish enough to get spotted. Open bullet exchanges rarely go well because you almost always get back more than you invest. The game is super annoying because although it is so tough, most times you have no-one to blame but yourself for a lost mission as your concentration wavers for a moment, or because you forget to check for hidden guards.

### Third Time Around

For people who have played Commandos, welcome back to the war. Everything is immediately familiar this time around, if a little prettier, more detailed and more sensible. For one, you can now peak through key holes to check out what's





Ahh... reminds us a bit of Call of Duty...



Snipe from the safety of another page

## SPY VS. SPY

One of the big additions, which offsets the shortish campaign, is a competitive or co-operative multiplayer mode. Now you can play Capture the Flag or Deathmatch with up to eleven other players. In these games you can play the commandos, commandos plus some assorted soldiers (fodder) or just no-names versus no-names. If you want to add AI-controlled Nazis then you can as well.

anyone who walks right in front of them.

This is pretty basic, and while it does help add a feel that your Green Beret might think of defending himself if discovered, it's not good enough to really affect the game's dynamics.

In a further effort to make things a little more logical, Pyro has included a tutorial to help bring players up to speed and the interface has improved. Now the odd key commands and buried icons have been replaced by icons on the main screen, and left-clicking plus TAB, Z or CTRL will handle most functions. The system is better, but not great. The same can be said for the mission objectives, which are now approaching being understandable - a big plus.

Overall, Commandos 3 takes what was good about the previous games and runs with it. Players who loved the last two games are going to love this one too. Players who have never tried the series



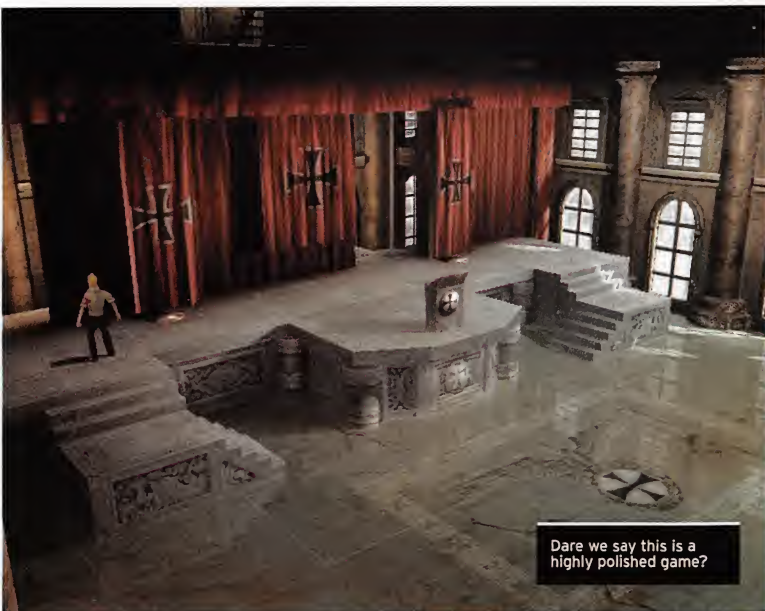
before, but like the idea of the tension and strategy of creeping between Nazi patrols, silently picking them off and, finally, leaving explosive surprises, are going to get a bang out of Commandos... if they don't mind a challenge.

Destination Berlin is, like its predecessors, a deadly combination of difficulty, self-recrimination and satisfaction. You get sucked in, forget to Quicksave, make a minor mistake and then curse like a sailor. You know you should have a break but you can see it all fall into place in your head so you hit Load and subject yourself to it all over again. There is nothing quite like Commandos-brand strategy.

Timothy C. Best

behind a door. It's a little thing but it adds a touch of realism to your spying and thieving, as does the fact that everyone can use basic firearms this time around. What kind of Spy can't shoot a gun?

By the same logic, what kind of commando will just stand there and get shot? The answer to that question is a pretty lame one, so Pyro has also added a 'cover' mode which lets commandos open fire on



Dare we say this is a highly polished game?

## THE ALLIES' BEST

**Green Beret:** Silent kill specialist. Can take enough hits to fool you into trying the direct approach, and is strong enough to yank a machine off its mount and make a mess.

**Sniper:** Deadly at range. Your best friend in open maps.

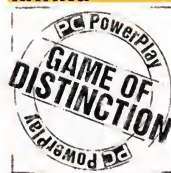
**Sapper:** Explosives expert who can use stealthy knock-out gas or non-stealthy mines, remote bombs and flame throwers.

**Spv:** Can impersonate enemy officers and boss Nazis around... sometimes. Generally he likes being spotted and bumped off.

**Thief:** The most agile and go-anywhere guy you have. Since he can KO people quietly he makes a great scout.

**Diver:** Our Aussie addition to the squad. Can swim and is super useful because he can silently kill enemies from range with his throwing knife.

## RATING



## FOR

Challenging  
Great Atmosphere  
Very tactical

## AGAINST

Bang, you're dead  
Quicksave hell  
Extreme difficulty

## OVERALL

Hard, infuriating and satisfying all at once; Commandos, there's nothing quite like it.

80





Load coal. Drive. Unload coal. And repeat.

# Trainz Railroad Simulator 2004

Where anal attention to detail is a good thing

Developer: Auran ■ Publisher: Auran ■ Distributor: Auran ■ Price: TBA ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

## SYSTEM

### NEED

P3-667  
128MB RAM  
32MB Video card  
500MB HDD

### WANT

P4-2GHz+  
512MB RAM  
GeForce4  
Broadband Internet

### MULTIPLAYER

No

### ONLINE

[www.auran.com/trs2004](http://www.auran.com/trs2004)  
Your launch point to a frighteningly large universe of third party content, including every loco ever built... eventually

## RATING



### OVERALL

An almost perfect model railroad sim

84

**T**rainz has become more than just a game. Never a traditional title, the model railroad simulator by the Aussie developer of Dark Reign has, largely thanks to its online community, become one of the world's first 'virtual hobbies'. It's been embraced by the old skool model railroading heads and adopted by thousands more as a way of prototyping expensive and time-consuming physical model layouts.

The first version of Trainz was pretty lean - a handful of trains, and a set of tools to build layouts. Yet even with this limited content, the fans went crazy modelling most of the known world, or at least those parts of the world covered in rail. The next edition, Ultimate Trainz Collection added some more functionality and beefed the online content exchange system.

## Fatter Controller

TRS2004 sees a continuing maturation of the Trainz concept. Originally, Auran intended users to own unique model trains and exchange them like trading cards. Now, the game has evolved to encourage third party amateurs to build astoundingly intricate new trains and share them online, free to registered users.

In fact Auran has spent a lot of development time devising a content sharing system that is pretty much unique. While Auran maintains control of all content by hosting it on its own servers, for the end user the download experience is more like the halcyon days of Napster - search for what you want, press a couple of buttons, and a new train or layout is downloaded into your installation of the game.

TRS2004 adds a lot of functionality that we were expecting in the original game. The world is now considerably more alive thanks to a commodity system. Different buildings on any given layout are associated with



different industries - lumber mills, power stations, docks etc - and these industries either consume or produce different commodities. It's up to the player to keep each industry supplied via their trains.

Pretty dry stuff to a generation brought up on Doom and Quake 3, perhaps, but to the train fan, it's heaven on earth. This basic commodity supply model can be combined with a scripting system to create scenarios, where gruff yardmasters bark orders at rookie drivers to get the commerce of the layout flowing smoothly. Players can now use multiple drivers with multiple trains that all have AI and can be instructed to perform a variety of tasks.

## Boiler prOn

Basically, TRS2004 is now the ultimate model railroad sim. It has all the advantages of real model railroading - spline tracks, thousands of different

## CHOKO CHOKO CHOKO!

For a game aimed at den-dwelling 40 somethings, TRS2004 is hardly forgiving with the system requirements. While a basic layout will run on a modest machine, as soon as you start getting into some of the big layouts, Mr Chug comes to town. Sadly, not even the leanest 3D engine in the world could save Trainz - there's just so much content even the beefiest machine will eventually choke on it. You have been warned.

objects to attach to layouts, different texture themes - but now includes a living world so you no longer have to crouch in your garage talking to imaginary people and loading imaginary coal.

If this tickles you enough to rush out and buy TRS2004 be aware that this is still an evolving application. There are still numerous gaping holes in the retail release, although Auran promises to address some of them in a patch available soon after it goes on sale.

For instance, it's not possible to check the status of your assignments after you look at a waybill to see which industry needs what. Smaller problems include overhead electric wires disappearing in tunnels, problems with shadows and fog, and a few awkward interface issues inside the otherwise impeccably modelled cabs.

All in all though, this version of Trainz sounds the death-knell for all pretenders to this very exclusive throne. It's bigger, better, and has massive amounts of new content. Even if you already own Ultimate Trainz Collection, TRS2004 will dramatically improve your on-rails gaming experience.

Anthony Fordham





# Generals: Zero Hour

Proving that expansion packs are sometimes a great idea

Developer: Westwood ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$49.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

**E**xpansion packs are caught between a rock and a hard place. Either they contain so little content that the asking price of \$50 is outrageous, or they contain so much that gamers become suspicious that they've effectively paid another \$50 for stuff that should have been in the original game in the first place.

Zero Hour falls in the latter camp, which is certainly the lesser of two evils. The pack gives the Generals fan a very tasty and very chunky wedge of new gameplay, including the expected extra units and missions.

Typically, expansions add only a couple of extra units to each race in an RTS to address tiny niggling issues of game balance. Starcraft: Brood War was the epitome of balance tweaking, adding only two new units per race but creating a whole new flavour of game as a result.

## Unexpected generosity

Zero Hour is a little more generous, giving each new side two or three new units, a new structure, and a generous handful of new special weapons and abilities.

The USA's vulnerability to stealthed units attacking its bases is addressed by the Sentry Drone, which detects hidden units and can be upgraded with an

effective machine gun for taking down infantry. The Microwave Tank makes mincemeat of enemy structures, while the Avenger Humvee paints targets with a laser sight, improving the accuracy of allied missile and rocket strikes. Meanwhile, the new Fire Base is an effective artillery base defence that can garrison eight soldiers and significantly bolster vulnerable Patriot Missiles.

As well, the US gets the Spectre Gunship, a devastating 5 Star General

ability that unleashes a heavily armed C-130 over enemy bases, as well as the MOAB, now the biggest bomb in the game.

China, meanwhile, only gets the ECM Tank, the Helix 2 armoured transport chopper and the Listening Outpost, but also enjoys a host of new abilities and upgrades such as Neutron Mines and Satellite Hack. Also, its new Internet Centre allows for some crazy new General moves and special weapons.

Finally, the GLA gets a new Battle Bus, a Saboteur, the funky Combat Cycle and can now build fake structures to confuse opponents. As an added twist, these fakes can be converted to real buildings, further flummoxing your foe.

## New challenge

So that's the new content in a nutshell... except it's only half of it. Zero Hour includes a new game mode called Generals Challenge where the player can pit their wits against nine specialist generals, three for each side, and play as one of the generals and enable even more new units, upgrades and special weapons. Each general has a speciality, such as Tanks, Nuclear, Special Weapons or Stealth which both enhance the player's abilities and restrict what units are available in the game.

This is a big expansion for an already well-heeled game. It makes Generals positively epic and will refresh your online experience if you've already exploited every strategy the original game offers.

It also presents a scoring problem. Since you need Generals to play it, non-General's players will probably give it a miss. But for General's owners, Zero Hour is nothing short of an essential purchase, and for that it gets the gold.

Anthony Fordham

## SYSTEM

### NEED

C&C Generals  
P3-1GHz+  
128MB RAM  
64MB Video card

### WANT

P4-2GHz+  
512MB RAM  
Radeon 9700  
1GB HDD

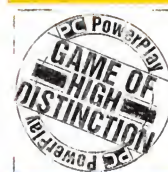
### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### ONLINE

[www.usdoj.gov/ag/playingmanual.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/playingmanual.htm)  
What better way to improve your GLA game by reading the Al-Qaeda training manual? Courtesy of the US Department of Justice, free of charge.

## RATING



### OVERALL

An expansion done right. Get it now

# 90







Shall we go for coffee after the game?



# NHL 2004

This time the gloves are off

Developer: EA Sports ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: G8+ ■ Available: Now

## SYSTEM

### NEED

PIII 700MHz or equivalent  
128Mb RAM  
32Mb 3D Video Card  
820Mb HDD

### WANT

P4 1.5GHz or equivalent  
256Mb RAM  
64Mb 3D Video Card  
820Mb HDD

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### ONLINE

[www.azhockey.com](http://www.azhockey.com)  
Everything you could ever want to know about ice hockey in a handy alphabetical format.

## RATING



### OVERALL

Far and away the best NHL game yet, 2004 takes the franchise in a new direction and it pays off in spades.

86

There's an old joke that goes something along the lines of, I went to a fight and a game of ice hockey broke out. With the latest iteration of the EA NHL franchise the joke couldn't be more accurate, considering that amongst the other spiffy new additions to the game comes a brand new (and surprisingly good) fighting engine. Unlike the last few games in the franchise, NHL 2004 is not simply a graphically superior version of the previous year's game - it's a whole new animal, walking surely down the serious simulation path whilst not skimping on the fast paced fun. Although NHL 2003 took a far more arcade style route to go head to head with Midway's NHL Hitz, NHL 2004 goes in the totally opposite direction, adding a heretofore never seen realism to computerised hockey. Whilst the final product isn't nearly as accessible as the previous instalments of the series it is far and away the best for a number of reasons, including a new Dynasty feature (kind of like a far simpler ice hockey Championship Manager), superior graphics and controls that cater to the pro and beginner alike.

Previous games in the series have basically been more about taking as many shots at the opponent's goal as possible,

## CONTROL

Although it is possible to play NHL 2004 with the keyboard, anyone serious about their love of ice hockey should invest in a good dual analogue gamepad if they don't already have one. Although the basic digital/button controls are good, NHL 2004 truly shines once you've mastered the analogue controls - playing against a friend who has also mastered the controls is nothing short of brilliant.



but NHL 2004 opts for a far more realistic approach with players needing to effectively control both the skaters and the rink to set up goals, making them few and far between but all the more cherished. The new level of realism is due to two different factors - the fighting engine and new analogue control system. The combination of the two allows the player to control the player and stick/puck independently using both analogue sticks on a gamepad, allowing for unprecedented control of the teams. Aside from allowing for far more precise manoeuvring and shooting, the dual control allows players new and improved ways to take the puck, including manual hooks, dekes and slams. Of course the fighting engine is also used for the fights that sometimes break out between players after a particularly hard slam or sneaky hook. Although they are essentially mini-games, these fights are nearly deep



enough to warrant a game of their own. If the dual analogue controls are too much for you or you're just looking for some fast fun, NHL 2004 also supports the more traditional button controlled shooting, passing and dekeing. NHL 2004 also supports online play so you should never have to worry about finding an opponent so long as you have a fast connection.

The new graphics engine looks great but occasionally shows some slight frame-rate issues. Animations are superb and the aforementioned fights are quite spectacular. Unfortunately the running commentary seems a lot drier than in previous incarnations of the series - it's only a small gripe but it's a lot more fun hearing some ecstatic and almost nonsensical exclamation when you score a goal instead of simply hearing the name of the player that scored the goal.

Daniel Wilks





# Warlords IV: Heroes of Etheria

Hands up who's still got a 2D videocard?

Developer: Infinite Interactive ■ Publisher: Ubi Soft ■ Distributor: Ubi Soft ■ Price: \$89.95 ■ Rating: MA15+ ■ Available: Now

**S**ome games are like an elven bard, being beautiful but poetic light-weights. Others are like human storytellers, technically proficient but so thoroughly rehearsed that you'd rather hear the elf's 14-hour ode to dewdrops on flowers.

Warlords IV is more like the grizzled old dwarf telling tales with fire in his eyes. It's not pretty, doesn't use fancy language, or even trim its beard as regularly as you'd like, but there's just something captivating in the rough edges.

Warlords IV continues the tradition of fantasy-themed turned-based strategy. You have elves, dwarves, undead, humans, demons, dragons, ogres, dark elves and orcs. In fact that's pretty much a list of the player races. Then you have heroes, magic artefacts, skill trees for both heroes and

regular units, mid-mission quests that offer bonus rewards for crypt hunting as well as dozens of magic spells in half a dozen schools. Then, of course, you have your Warlord who dwells in your capital city and is your central character. You select two schools of magic or a focus on melee, a name and portrait, as well as a preferred race and you're away.

As you go through the missions, you gain experience, new abilities and access to new spells. The advances make a real difference without overwhelming the

strategy, and the game gives you just enough flavour for you to want to keep sneaking peaks at your various Warlords in the rogue's gallery, seeing your campaign stats, checking on the groupies who follow you between missions and marvelling at the stuff you insist on carting around with you like a Mage's Tower and Armoury.

Combat is an interesting little contraption too, that like the dwarf, keeps all of its joys hidden under a stern exterior. When a fight starts you pick a single guy, from your stack of up to eight units, and he steps into the battle window against a single enemy unit. The two fight. There's no retreat – that unit stays in until it's whittled away or all enemies are vanquished.

Doesn't sound too elegant, does it? Where's the flanking, where's the teamwork? Well, that all comes from the other units in your stack and their special abilities. Some heal, archers pelt an opponent before the first swing and siege weapons take down defending towers as you battle. The strategy is remarkably deep. Do you have an expensive up front and rely on armour, healing and combat spells to defeat an entire enemy stack or do you drop some specialist units, wear enemies down with cannon fodder and then clean up with a good unit or two? With special abilities like 'Assassin', that give units a chance for one hit kills, and 'Taunt', which draws a random unit into the fray, you can make a mockery of either plan.

Like everything in this game, the system proves to be much more complicated and fun that it has any right to be. One by one the features won't blow you away, but these aren't your normal features, they get together in gangs and creep up on you.

Timothy C. Best

## CAMPAIGN TRAIL

The Warlords IV campaign is pretty cool. You start in one corner of the map and then you choose territories to invade. They either advance the story or give you a bonus for the coming battles. At risk are the three units that you can carry between games (which are usually the ones you've carefully groomed for greatness), not to mention the embarrassment of having your Warlord bumped off. When you get through the campaign you've still got skirmish maps, random maps, multiplayer modes (including play by mail) and a game editor to play with.



## SYSTEM

### NEED

P500  
128Mb RAM  
32 Mb Videocard  
1Gb HDD space

### WANT

P1Gz+  
256Mb RAM  
32Mb Videocard

### MULTIPLAYER

Yes

### ONLINE

<http://www.killerdwarfs.com/>

They're a band and they have such a spiffy photo on their front page I couldn't resist.

## RATING



### OVERALL

Like a dwarven mace: old-school yet compelling.

78



# TECH IN REVIEW

**T**he war of the processors continues. Those of you who still retain a short term memory will remember that PCPP checked out the AMD Athlon FX-51 last month, and were blown away by both its performance and ridiculously high price. This month sees Intel's answer to the FX-51, in the form of the Pentium 4 3.2GHz Extreme Edition, which happens to be even more extremely priced. How does two thousand buckaroos grab you?

Despite AMD's best efforts to foil our plans, we also managed to get hold of an Athlon 64 3200+, and came to the conclusion that this is probably the best of the new batch of processors in terms of a happy price/performance balance. Good luck finding one though, as supply issues have reared their ugly head despite AMD's reassurances that chips would be plentiful.

I had copious amounts of joy checking out 16 different PC cases in this issue's PowerTest; it's great to see that a stylish case no longer necessitates putting your children to work in your friendly neighbourhood coal mine. You can now grab a tricked-up, feature-packed beauty for under \$200, which is a massive reduction in cost from only a year ago.

We've also reviewed the greatest speakers to ever grace the PC, and Stuart gave these Klipsch speakers a whopping 98% - that's got to be a record for the highest score ever in PCPP's hardware section.

Speaking of high scores, you might have noticed that over the last couple of months the average hardware review score in PCPP has been relatively high. Fear not, we're not a bunch of geeks who are easily excitable. You know the type; show



## 87 Powertest PC Cases

them a new remote control that uses Bluetooth (aka SnoozeTooth) and chances are they'll spooge themselves. It's just that we've had so many quality products flooding our store room that we haven't had much of a chance to lay the boot in to anything substandard.

Next month should see our coverage swing back to graphics land, with the imminent release of the ATI RADEON 9800XT and NVIDIA GeForceFX 5950. As you can see from the names these are just refreshes of existing products, so we're pretty sure they're not going to offer a paradigm shift in performance. But we'll let the

benchmarks speak for themselves...

**Bennett Ring**  
Deputy Editor,  
[bennetr@next.com.au](mailto:bennetr@next.com.au)

- 94 Gigabyte R96P  
RADEON 9600 PRO
- 96 Sennheiser  
PC150 headphones
- 96 Klipsch ProMedia  
Ultra 5.1
- 98 Altec Lansing VS4121
- 98 SIIG Serial ATA PCI card
- 100 Shuttle SB65G2 mini-PC
- 102 Pentium 4 3.2GHz  
Extreme Edition
- 103 Athlon 64 3200+

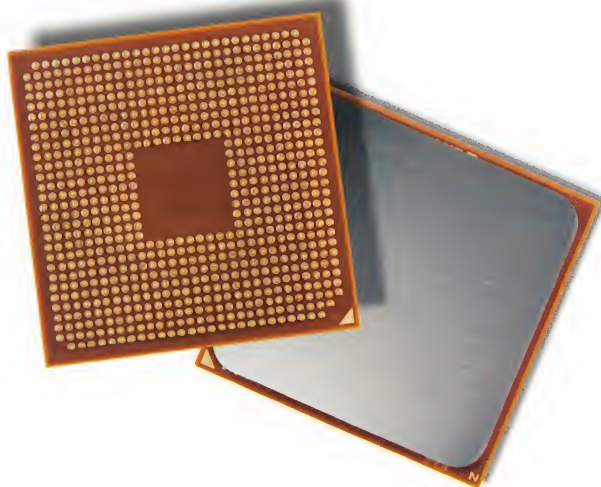
### HOW WE TESTED

For an in-depth explanation of how we test video cards, CPUs, and motherboards head to our PowerTools section on page 104. You'll also see a list of hardware that makes up the PCPP testbenches, which are used for the testing of the majority of our hardware.

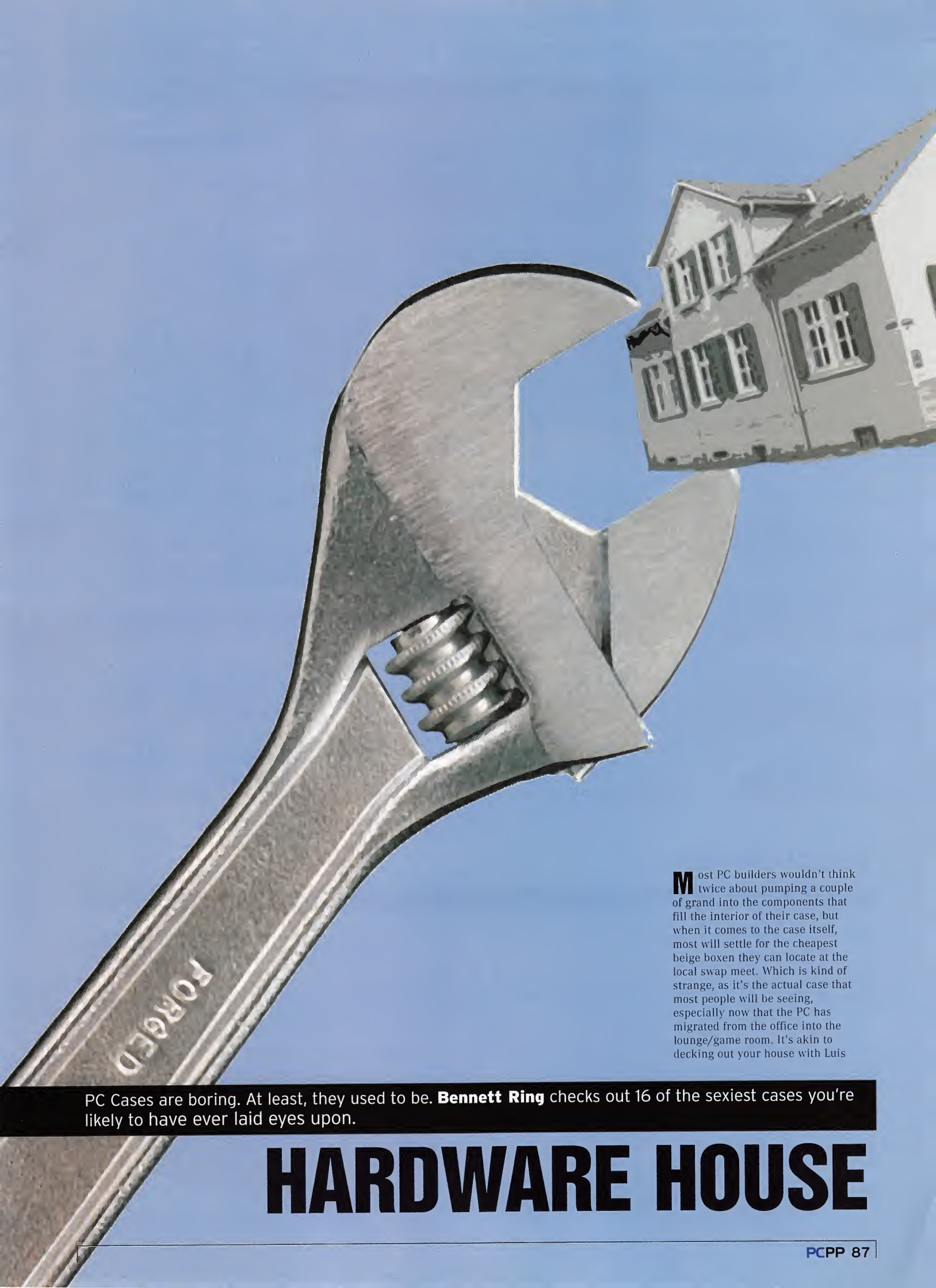
Where possible we use benchmarks based on real world games to test hardware performance; this way we know for sure which component will give you the best gaming experience. We don't love hardware for hardware's sake - it's all about using this hardware to make your

entertainment even more, well, entertaining. We also try to compare the review product with the current "best of class" piece of hardware, so at the end of the day you'll know exactly which product offers you the best bang for buck.

For a product to earn a Power Award, price be damned, we're just looking at how this product performs. If there's nothing better, that we've seen at least, it'll get the Power Award. However, if a product offers a great level of performance or features for a very reasonable price, it'll get the Value Award. Simple, really.







**M**ost PC builders wouldn't think twice about pumping a couple of grand into the components that fill the interior of their case, but when it comes to the case itself, most will settle for the cheapest beige boxen they can locate at the local swap meet. Which is kind of strange, as it's the actual case that most people will be seeing, especially now that the PC has migrated from the office into the lounge/game room. It's akin to decking out your house with Luis

PC Cases are boring. At least, they used to be. **Bennett Ring** checks out 16 of the sexiest cases you're likely to have ever laid eyes upon.

# HARDWARE HOUSE



Vuitton furniture and Smeg appliances, and then plastering the exterior walls with scabby band-aids using rotten mayonnaise as a glue substitute.

Normally we'd take any chance we've got to give Apple a healthy smack in the chops, but when it comes to cases we've got to hand it to the MacHeads. Back in the beigetastical days of 1997, Apple released the iMac, and people started to realise that computers didn't need to look like the bastard stepchild of a washing machine. But this bizarre creation didn't utilise a standard case design – instead the components were crammed into the back of the translucent monitor housing. It took the spectacular Blue and White edition of the G3 in 1999 before geeks could truly see the potential for designer cases.

Before we knew it Lian Li had hit the scene with its sexy black and aluminium cases for the PC, and the rest, as those prone to exceedingly boring clichés like me say, is history. The case market is now literally flooded with a huge range of cases, and thankfully beige seems to be about as popular as a soccer fan at an AFL grand final.

When purchasing a new home for all your bits and pieces of state of the art silicon, there are a number of factors to keep in mind. In our beauty-obsessed, superficial and ultimately shallow opinion, first and foremost is the case's appearance. While we doubt having a gorgeous case is going to be much assistance in luring the opposite sex into your boudoir, it will certainly help to dispel the myth that computer geeks don't have any taste. Now, we all know that aesthetics are a matter of personal taste (with the fact that some people mysteriously find the



**Back in the beigetastical days of 1997, Apple released the iMac, and people started to realise that computers didn't need to look like the bastard stepchild of a washing machine.**

honkmeister Gerard Depardieu to be an attractive man ample evidence of this fact), so choose the case that you like – not the one that your mate thinks is a bit of a stunner. Oh, and it's always preferable to get a case colour that matches your drapes. Sadly, not many people have silver or black curtains...

Most cases include a PSU (Power Supply Unit), so it's a good idea to check out how much power the case's PSU dishes out. If you're running an overclocked system with lots of drives, we recommend getting nothing less than a 350W PSU, with 400W and above being preferable. However, the quality of

the PSU is also very important – many high quality 250W PSUs will serve you better than a Yum Cha 400W PSU.

What sort of case do you want? If you're building a media box, go for a desktop/HiFi style case. If you want a relatively small case that can still fit a full sized motherboard, mid-towers might be to your liking. And if you've got penile issues and are after a huge phallic substitute, you'll be needing a big-assed full tower.

Next up is the feature list of the case. Does it have enough internal and external drive bays to house your DivX/pr0n farm's multitude of hard drives? A feature that we love,

but which is sadly quite rare, is a removable motherboard tray. These allow you to slide the mobo out of the rear for easy access, without having to remove all of your drives and cluttered cabling. A case using a toolless design is also desirable, as you won't need to find your Philips head screwdriver to make any hardware changes. Likewise with thumbscrews securing the sides to the chassis. Any sign of a spiffy front panel with temperature monitors or fan speed controllers? Heck, you can even get cases with fake fish aquariums in the side, although these aren't quite as commonplace as Perspex windows. Thank god for that.

Finally there is the case's build quality, although this isn't quite as important as many reviewers would have you believe. Let's face it, unless you're a LANiac, chances are you're not going to be putting your PC under much stress, so who gives a toss if it can withstand the effects of a 10 kiloton tactical nuke being detonated within? As long as the case doesn't flex, bend or warp under normal conditions, it should be fine. Likewise with rounded edges. You see, the innards of your PC case are renowned for being a finger unfriendly zone, as it's quite easy to cut yourself on the sharp edges of the metal frame. However, if you're careful you needn't worry about this, and is it really worth spending more just to make sure you don't bleed out all over your motherboard?

Like monitors, if you choose a case with care it will last you many more years than the components that will be stored within. And if you get hold of one that is suitably spiffy, you might even be able to persuade friends and family that computers can be cool! Stylish even!

## Accent HT100S

• Price: \$407 without PSU • Distributor: AusPC Market [www.auspcmarket.com.au](http://www.auspcmarket.com.au) • URL: Kanam <http://kanam.co.kr>

The accent is one of those cases cashing in on the craze to make PCs look like part of a Bang & Olufsen HiFi setup, and it's got a similar price tag to what we'd expect from a bit of B&O gear. How does \$400 without a PSU sound? Ouch.

However, it's one of the few home theatre style cases that has enough room to squeeze in a full sized ATX motherboard, as well as a full sized ATX PSU, which is very handy. Surprisingly, you'll also be able to fit a total of four drives into the case, with two 3.5" bays and two 5.25" bays, one of which has

external access. There is no external bay for a floppy drive, which isn't a problem in this day and age of USB Thumbdrives, and the inclusion of two 60mm fans should keep the interior of your case nice and cool.

On the front of the sexy silver fascia is a 2 line VFD display, which is hooked up to your mobo's parallel port. A slight problem is that the necessary software to drive this display is not included with the case, so you'll have to track down the best software for it; thankfully the distributor can point you in the right direction. Sturdy construction means that you'll be able to stack

other gear on top of this case, and most of the edges within seem to be relatively smooth. A small gripe we have is the way the case cover screws are mounted on the underside of the case, rather than the rear as we'd expect.

While we can't complain about

this case's good looks, the high price without a PSU is a little concerning. But for those of you with a load of cash and a burning desire to make your PC look like part of your HiFi setup, the Accent HT100 comes recommended due to its ATX friendly interior.



PCPP Score

Score: 3.5/5



# Ahanix DBox



• Price: \$189 with 400W PSU • Distributor: PC Case Gear [www.pccasegear.com.au](http://www.pccasegear.com.au) • URL: Ahanix [www.ahanix.com](http://www.ahanix.com)

While the build quality of this case isn't quite as impressive as that of the Antec cases, with a slightly inferior paint job and thinner metal used in its construction, it has a number of features that could very well persuade you to choose this case over all of the others.

Most impressive of these is the inclusion of a digital thermometer with three temperature probes. Whack one on your CPU, one on your video card and one on your hard drive and you'll be able to tell

at the press of a button exactly which component is doing its best impersonation of a barbeque. When things get a little too toasty, you can set the temperature monitor to automatically shut down your PC, although most motherboards have this feature already. Even better than the temperature monitor is the built in fan speed controller, and this allows you to set your myriad of case fans to one of ten different levels. For a midi-tower this case has a hell of a lot of drive bays – twelve, in fact. And the fact that you can mount all your hardware without even going near a

screwdriver is yet another bonus.

A very cool touch is the inclusion of "stealth" external bays; basically these are covers for your beige drives, so that they fit in with the look of the case. Speaking of looks, this is a

rather attractive case, with a nice big Perspex window in the side to show off your wares.

Rounding off this already excellent case is its competitive price. At a mere \$189 including a beastly 400W PSU, you can't go wrong with the DBox.



PCPP Score

Score 4.5/5

# Antec Minuet

• Price: \$143 with 220W PSU • Distributor: Altech [www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au) • URL: Antec [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)

Like the Accent, this case is designed to fit in well with your other AV audio equipment, but it's a much smaller beast, at around half of the height. While this lower profile makes it even more really, really, good-looking (a small joke for the Zoolander fans), the problem is that you'll only be able to fit a Micro-ATX motherboard into the case, and there is no way in hell a full sized AGP card will fit. So don't even think about using this case as your primary gaming rig, unless you enjoy using

integrated graphics to make your games look like pure crap.

But as a dedicated media/home theatre box, this case offers exceptional features at an exceptionally low price point. It's got a stunning exterior, thanks to the glossy black paint job, silver face and chrome highlights. In fact, it looks so good that it's hard to believe you can pick up this case for less than \$150, with a PSU included. Speaking of the PSU, the 220W model included is a proprietary model, so if it dies you'll need to purchase another Antec PSU.

Considering the small size of this case it's nice to see three drive bays; one external 5.25", one external 3.5" (for those of you who just can't bare to trash your floppy drive), and one 3.5" internal. These bays are mounted in an innovative rotating

bay, which makes drive installation a cinch.

If you're looking for a new case to house your media box, and don't need it to hold an ATX mobo or full sized AGP card, look no further than the Minuet. Highly recommended.



PCPP Score

Score : 4/5

# Antec PlusView 1000AMG

• Price: \$171 without PSU • Distributor: Altech [www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au) • URL: Antec [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)

While Antec are pimping this tower case as a SOHO file server, it's obvious that they're also targeting it at the gaming market – how many file servers do you know of that have a Perspex window?

This is a most impressive case, for a variety of reasons. The side door has a special locking mechanism, keeping your components secure at even the most criminal infested LAN. There are a whopping ten drive bays mounted in three enclosures, two of which are

totally removable with the quick tug of a lever. And once you've removed these bays, the included mounting clips for your drives will make screwdrivers a thing of the past. Five different fan mounts, with two already containing fans, mean those with a fetish for round spinny things will be in their element. One of these in particular is in a brilliant position – on the side of the case, right over the spot where your PCI cards would be. This could prove very handy for those running a RADEON 9800XT, which auto-overclocks based on the temperature

of the video card.

Antec's trademark excellent paint job is present, this time in a gun metal grey, and combined with the fancy grill and drive

covering door makes this a very grunty looking case. The steel construction feels very sturdy, but it's a heavy sucker, making it unsuitable for those who spend most weekends LANing their life away.



PCPP Score

Score : 4/5



## Antec Sonata

• Price: \$249 with 380W Trupower PSU • Distributor: Altech [www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au) • URL: Antec [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)

The Sonata promises to be a silent home for your gear, and has a number of features that should help this case remain as quiet as an ant fart. Instead of having a hundred and one different fan mounts, this mini-tower only has two, but they're both big 120mm mounts. As we all know, the bigger the fan, the quieter it can be run without hurting cooling performance too much, and one of these mounts already has a 120mm fan mounted in it.

The included PSU is a 380W

TruePower PSU, which is designed to run silently, although I can't ever remember being disturbed by the sound of a PSU, especially when compared to the hard drive, CPU fan and video card cooling. Each of the nine drive bays includes rubber grommets which the drives rest on, helping to reduce vibrations and hopefully keeping the noise levels down. Around half of these drive bays are mounted sideways, which makes installing drives quite simple, although this will lead to slightly messier cabling, especially if you're still using IDE drives.

Like the rest of the Antec cases,

this black beastly has a high quality paint job that isn't likely to scratch easily. It's a rather attractive case, although the fake crystal around the USB ports looks a little cheap. Those of you with an unnatural phobia

towards screwdrivers will be happy to hear that this case utilises a toolless construction.

In all a rather nice case, but one that doesn't seem to offer quite as good value as the PlusView 1000AMG.

PCPP Score

Score 3.5/5



## Antec Lanboy

• Price: \$185 with 350W Blue LED PSU • Distributor: Altech [www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au) • URL: Antec [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)

If you can't guess who this mini-tower case is targeted at from its name, you probably don't even know how to turn a computer on, so get into something a little simpler. Anyone for Hopscotch?

This is a featherweight of a case, as it's made entirely from aluminium, unlike the steel construction of the other Antec cases. Combine this with the included carrying strap, and the Lanboy is the perfect mobile case for all of your LANing needs. It's

even got a spot for a padlock to stop the case side being removed, and a small tool bay at the back will happily house the essential couple of tools that always seem to come in handy during those all night gaming fests.

A Perspex window will allow you to show off the brand new \$1200 video card your parents just bought you, while the beefy 350W PSU should be more than enough for all but the most power crazed. The PSU even has spiffy blue LEDs to help brighten up the interior.

Like the PlusView, this case uses

a removable drive bay for three of the eight drive bays, which is a feature I've grown to love after building several systems for mates in this case.

Perhaps most

remarkable of all is the price of this case – at only

\$185 including the PSU, this case is an absolute bargain.



PCPP Score

Score : 4.5/5



## AOpen H360A

• Price: \$120 with 250W PSU • Distributor: BlueChip IT [www.bluechipit.com.au](http://www.bluechipit.com.au) • URL: AOpen [www.aopen.com](http://www.aopen.com)

After staring at this desktop case for a prolonged period of time, we still can't decide whether or not it's actually a good looker. So it's up to you to make up your own mind about this case's looks – who knows, it might look ok in an IKEAnised home. Even the paint job had us scratching our heads – was it grey, beige or silver? After borrowing the colour sensitive eyes of our designer, we ended up concluding that it's actually a very bland grey colour.

It's around the same size as the Antec Minuet, and as a result is only suitable for Micro-ATX motherboards and PSUs. And no, this housing will not be able to handle a full sized AGP card either, making it only worthy of your consideration if you're after a media/home theatre box.

Three drive bays should take care of the minimal storage needs of your media box, and like the Minuet these are housed in a rotating drive bay, making installation a painless process, made even easier by their toolless

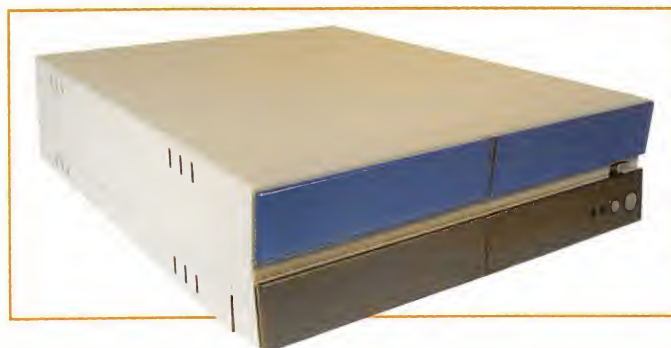
design. A 250W PSU is also included, and AOpen claim that this is fine for a 3GHz Pentium 4. A microphone and headphone jack is included on the front panel, alongside the regulation 2 x USB

and 1 x FireWire ports.

There are no cigars for second place, and while there's nothing particularly nasty about this case, the H360A runs a distant second to the Minuet.

PCPP Score

Score : 3/5





## AOpen H700B \$220

• Price: \$220 with 300W PSU • Distributor: BlueChip IT [www.bluechipit.com.au](http://www.bluechipit.com.au) • URL: Aopen [www.aopen.com](http://www.aopen.com)

The first words that came out of my mouth after unstacking this mountain of metal were "Whoa Momma". This tower case is a giant, with enough 1mm steel in its construction to rebuild the Sydney Harbour Bridge. As a result, it weighs a ton, but if you're in the market for a server tower you're probably not going to be moving it much.

Unlike the previous AOpen case, we were impressed with the look of this monolith as soon as we removed it from its packaging. It's

big, it's black, it's beautiful. Now if only it had the eye from HAL in the middle of the front, it'd be perfect.

If you're looking for a case to store several terabytes worth of hard drives, the thirteen drive bays within the H700B should be capable of holding them all. Unfortunately only three of these are mounted within a removable enclosure, but a whopping eight of these drive bays are externally accessible. If you do manage to fill all of these, the 7 fan mounts should keep your drives nice and cool, although only one of these is already fitted with a fan.

A feature that we love, and

which is surprisingly absent on most of the other cases, is the removable motherboard tray. This allows you to get to your motherboard without having to

disassemble your entire PC, and is a major timesaver when your hardware starts to cark it.

The H700B is a very well built, feature rich tower, with the added bonus that it looks damn fine.



PCPP Score

Score 4/5

## AOpen QF50W

• Price: \$140 with 300W PSU • Distributor: BlueChip IT [www.bluechipit.com.au](http://www.bluechipit.com.au) • URL: Aopen [www.aopen.com](http://www.aopen.com)

By the time we got to this case, we'd already seen a plethora of well built, attractive cases that were chockers with cool features such as Perspex windows and LED PSUs. So when we opened up the box and saw something so darn average, we couldn't help but be disappointed.

For starters, this is one ugly mofo. Seriously, just look at it. The product shot here makes it look better than in reality, but trust us when we say this thing looks dirt cheap, and more than a little tacky. Urgh. Even worse is the fact that the

hideous fascia is made of a really cheap plastic that feels like it's going to snap if you get a little rough with your power button.

Inside the case are six drive bays, but none of these have the convenience of a toolless design. There are only three fan mounts, and not a single fan is included with the case. The microphone, headphone and USB ports that are usually mounted on the front are instead mounted on the side; we're not sure why this annoys us, but it does. Just like the rest of the case really.

Perhaps the only redeeming

feature of this case is the fact that it sells for a meagre \$140, and this price includes a decent 300W PSU. However, when you compare this case to the rest of the competition, there's

just no two ways about it - you're much better off spending your hard earned on a different case. In fact, spend a tiny \$40 more and go and get yourself the LanBoy, which is a superior case in every way.



PCPP Score

Score : 2/5

## Chieftec BX

• Price: \$125 without PSU • Distributor: PC Case Gear [www.pccasegear.com.au](http://www.pccasegear.com.au) • URL: Chieftec [www.chieftec.com](http://www.chieftec.com)

As soon as we opened this box up to have a look at its glistening guts, the similarities between it and the PlusView 1000AMG were immediately obvious, right down to it using the exact same type of fan mounts. As a result, we've got a strong feeling that it is actually manufactured in the same factory as the Antec cases.

Like the Antec cases, you won't be able to complain about the excellent paint job that is present on the BX, which inspires confidence

that it'll be able to handle a thorough beating before needing a respray. It's also built very solidly, using hefty steel throughout, resulting in a case that you're going to want to move around as little as possible. Unless your feeble skeletal arms need a thorough workout, that is.

There are ten drive bays within the case, each utilising a toolless design, and six of these bays are mounted in removable cages. A massive six of these bays are externally accessible, with a swinging door on the front hiding these bays when they're not in use.

The BX isn't much to look at - it's just a big black ol' brick. Yet for those who aren't too concerned about the eye candy, it's a solidly built case without any flashy

bits, and offers pretty good value for money. And if you're into pretty, shiny things, this case could make a very solid basis for your next case modding project.



PCPP Score

Score : 3/5



## CoolerMaster Centurion

• Price: \$85 without PSU • Distributor: Australia IT [www.australiait.com.au](http://www.australiait.com.au) • URL: [www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)

When we phoned the distributor to find out the price of this case, we had to do a bit of a double take. 85 bucks for a CoolerMaster case? What the? CoolerMaster is a brand that is synonymous with extremely high pricing, so we were intrigued to see what they could offer in a sub-\$100 case.

Unlike the rest of CoolerMaster's product lines, the Centurion is built from steel instead of aluminium. This is then spray painted to look like aluminium, but the quality of the spray job isn't anything to write

home to Uncle Jake about. Thanks to the use of steel over aluminium, this case is one of the sturdiest little tackers in the entire PowerTest, but it has also resulted in a relatively heavy case.

When it comes to features, there are a total of eight drive bays... and that's about it. There's no perspex windows, no toolless design, no PSU and definitely no flashing strobe lights. You didn't expect much for \$85 did you?

Whether or not you like the look of this case is a matter of personal taste, but we're pretty indifferent about its aesthetics. In

fact, indifferent is a pretty good word to sum up how we feel about this case; it's neither remarkably good nor remarkably bad, but at the very least it's cheap. It's nice to

see that CoolerMaster knows how to make a case for under four hundred bucks, but they'll need to do a little better if they actually want to sell any of them.



PCPP Score

Score 2.5/5

## CoolerMaster WaveMaster

• Price: \$253 without PSU • Distributor: Australia IT [www.australiait.com.au](http://www.australiait.com.au) • URL: [www.coolermaster.com](http://www.coolermaster.com)

This is the same case that our Athlon FX-51 review system arrived in. Heck, if it's good enough for AMD's PR goons, it's good enough for us. Or is it?

Let it be said that this is the sexiest case in the entire roundup. Well, according to me, that is. But take a look at that sexy fascia - nothing we've seen in this PowerTest comes close to it. And when you turn it on, a mystical blue light emanates from behind the extrusion at the bottom of the front. Ok, it's not so mystical, being

provided by a couple of hidden LEDs, but it looks mighty fine in a subtle kind of way.

However, other than these super good looks, there isn't much to note about the WaveMaster. The biggest feature to get us feeling all warm and fuzzy is the removable motherboard tray, although this tended to stick when we tried to remove it. We can't complain though; at least it's there.

Thanks to its aluminium construction the WaveMaster is a very light case, yet remains sturdy and strong. The USB/FireWire/

microphone/headphone extension bay is mounted on the top of the case, and there are three 80mm fans mounts with included fans.

While it's not exactly a feature rich

case, there's no denying just how pretty this case is. However, you're going to need to dig deep for these good looks, as this case ships for \$250 without a PSU.

Holy Scheiße!



PCPP Score

Score : 3.5/5

## Lian Li PC37A

• Price: \$225 without PSU • Distributor: Anyware [www.anyware.com.au](http://www.anyware.com.au) • URL: Lian Li [www.lian-li.com](http://www.lian-li.com)

We can remember the first time we saw a Lian Li case - it was as if we'd died and gone to aluminium heaven. And yet, several years later, we can't help but think that Lian Li has stagnated a little, while the rest of the case manufacturers have caught up to their once innovative designs, and in many cases exceeded them.

Take the PC37A for example. It's not a bad looking case, with a single stealth bay to hide away your boring beige optical drive, but there's

something very plain about it. Lian Li's construction methods can't be faulted, as the PC37A has arguably the best build quality of all of the cases. And the fact that it's constructed from aluminium makes it one of the lightest cases in the roundup, making it perfect for the LANing crowd.

But other than that, there's not much to say about this case. It's got a total of eight drive bays, which isn't too shabby for such a small case, and has the obligatory USB/FireWire/microphone and headphone jacks on the front of

the case, tucked away behind a small door. If this case was selling for \$180 or so with a PSU, we wouldn't hesitate to recommend it. Unfortunately it's over two hundred bucks,

without a PSU, making it very hard to justify its purchase. At least Lian Li are pushing their prices downwards, as this case is relatively cheap compared to their prices a few years ago.



PCPP Score

Score : 3/5



# Lian Li PC9300

• Price: \$249 without PSU • Distributor: Anyware [www.anyware.com.au](http://www.anyware.com.au) • URL: Lian Li [www.lian-li.com](http://www.lian-li.com)

The PC9300 is another HiFi style desktop case, but unlike the Accent you won't be able to fit a full sized ATX motherboard within. However, it does have full height PCI slots, so you'll be able to fit a micro-ATX board equipped with a high end video card within.

Due to the small size of this case, you'll also need to use a micro-ATX PSU, but this shouldn't be a limiting factor unless you're running a half dozen drives or so. Not that you'll be able to in this case, as you're limited to a

maximum of four drive bays, two of which have external access.

As per Lian Li's usual standards, the build quality of this case is exceptional, with well rounded edges and a sturdy design. Small cases can be cramped cases, leading to a build up in heat, so the two 60mm fans included on the rear of the case should help to keep your temperatures below frying point.

It's a very attractive case, with a spiffy blue LED strip across the front that glows when you turn it on, but there aren't any stealth bays included. So unless you've got drives that have a silver/aluminium

exterior, you'll need to purchase Lian Li drive covers separately. Thankfully these can be had for a lowly sum of approximately

Unlike the PC37A, the PC9300 is an innovative case at a very competitive price. If you're looking

for a new home for your DivX/media box, and don't mind using a micro-ATX motherboard, you'd do well to check out this case.

PCPP Score

Score 4/5



# CodeGen Leo 6066

• Price: \$104.50 with 350W PSU • Distributor: AusPC Market [www.auspcmarket.com.au](http://www.auspcmarket.com.au) • URL: Codegen World [www.codegenworld.com](http://www.codegenworld.com)

You might not have heard of Codegen cases before - we hadn't until we started sourcing products for the PowerTest. So we were pleasantly surprised when this feature rich, tricked up case arrived for testing.

Like the DBox, the paint job on this case wasn't quite up to scratch when compared to the Antec cases, but it's not so bad that you'll need to whip out your home spray painting kit. It's also a little flimsy, especially the thin plastic fascia. Like many of the cases in the PowerTest it's pre-

modded, with a Perspex window in the side. Smack bang in the middle of this window is a fan mount, which will position a fan perfectly over your PCI/AGP slots. There's also a blowhole on the top, which is just a 60mm fan mounted in the top of the case. The theory behind this is that hot air rises, filling the top of your case with warm air, but in reality this isn't much of an issue.

Two stealth drive bay covers are included, a welcome feature for such a low priced case. Aesthetically speaking, the case is a bit iffy - make your own mind up whether or

not it's to your likings based on the product shots. One thing is for sure though, labelling the stealth drives with big, cheesy DVD and CD-RW logos wasn't the smartest idea

CodeGen ever had.

In all the 6066 is a respectable tower case that comes a close second to the Antec PlusView and LanBoy, but offers exceptional value for money.

PCPP Score

Score : 3.5/5



# Thermaltake Xaser III Super Tower

• Price: 249 without PSU • Distributor: Anyware [www.anyware.com.au](http://www.anyware.com.au) • URL: Thermaltake [www.thermaltake.com](http://www.thermaltake.com)

If you're looking for a case with a feature list as long as Ron Jeremy's shlong, you've come to the right place. Somehow Thermaltake have managed to cram in more features than your local movie house, which probably explains why this case weighs so much. At 19kg you're not going to be taking this beastie on family picnics.

If case cooling is your thang, the inclusion of seven low noise 80mm fans should get you hot and bothered. Two of these are mounted

in an innovative door that swings shut over your PCI slots, so you'll be able to overclock your video card to the hilt. A rheobus on the front of the case will allow you to control four of these fans, but even at top speed they're a relatively quiet bunch. In the middle of these controls is a small temperature monitor, allowing you to check your CPU temperature with a quick glance.

The USB/FireWire/headphone/microphone bay is mounted on the top, as opposed to the front like most other cases, and is hidden away by a small door. A total of

twelve drive bays await your storage needs, and those that are externally accessed are hidden by a swinging door. This is the kind of case you'll either love or hate - and after getting over the

liberal amount of branding present on the case I have to say I'm growing rather fond of this behemoth. However, considering it lacks a PSU it doesn't offer the greatest value for money.

PCPP Score

Score : 4/5





# Gigabyte R96P RADEON 9600 PRO

• Price: \$399 • Distributor: Rectron [www.rectron.com.au](http://www.rectron.com.au) (02) 9748 7725 URL: [www.gigabyte.com.tw](http://www.gigabyte.com.tw)

While it's all well and good to drool over the latest and greatest in graphics technology that can often be seen gracing the hallowed pages of PCPP, this short-lived sensation soon ends when the reality sets in that, in order to purchase such a beast, a second mortgage on the house and numerous arguments with the wife are inevitably going to follow. OK, maybe we exaggerated a little on the mortgage part, but don't be surprised if you find yourself sleeping on the couch and eating microwave dinners for at least six months post-purchase! Don't say you weren't warned. Anyway, if the above sounds like you, don't feel ashamed, because, according to consumer buying trends, you're certainly not alone. In fact, most video cards sales are in the mid-low end category, thus explaining why manufacturers push their budget products just as much as their high-end parts. Furthermore, the above is especially true in the graphics sector, where it is not uncommon to see four or five variations of a single GPU, each targeted at different market segments.

The latest budget graphics product to hit our labs is of the Radeon flavour, the Gigabyte Radeon 9600 Pro. Being targeted at the mid-range market, the R9600 Pro has enough grunt to stick it to the high-end cards, but comes at a price that is infinitely more affordable. Unlike its cousins (the 9500, 9700 and 9800), the R9600 GPU is based on 0.13 micron technology, meaning that it not only runs cooler, but is also significantly cheaper.

Furthermore, despite being a mid-range card, the Gigabyte R9600 Pro comes equipped with the same 2.8ns Samsung BGA DDR memory found on 9800 Pro cards (albeit, only 128MB of it)! Finally, those with keen eyes will notice that the usual floppy drive power connector is absent from the top right hand corner of the card, a testament to the power saving nature of 0.13-micron technology.

Feature-wise, Gigabyte hasn't missed a thing here, including features such as a regular D-SUB (VGA) connector, TV-Out and a DVI port. Additionally, multiple monitors are supported and Gigabyte has even gone as far as including a DVI-to-VGA adapter for those that wish to run dual DVI or VGA monitors. Nice. Not only does the card have an extensive feature-set, but Gigabyte has decided to include a huge software bundle as well, consisting of three full version games (Serious Sam: The First Encounter, Oni and 4x4 EVO), as well as a copy of PowerDVD 5.0 - very impressive considering that this is a budget card.

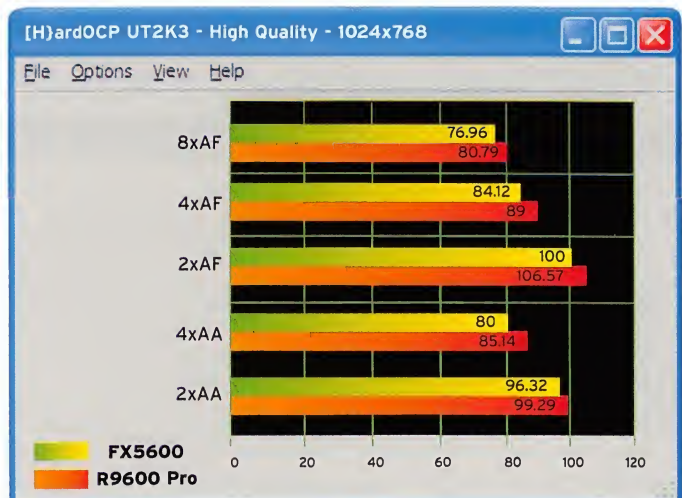
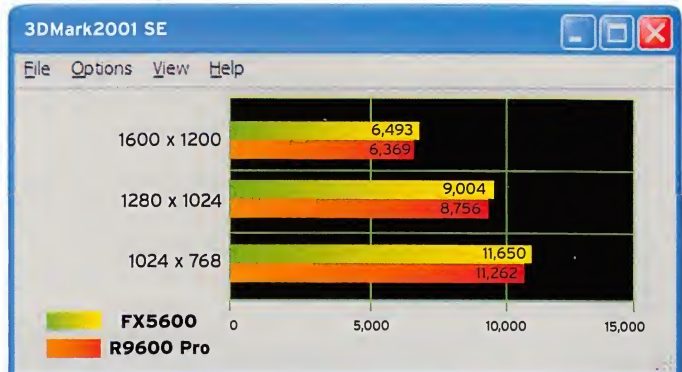
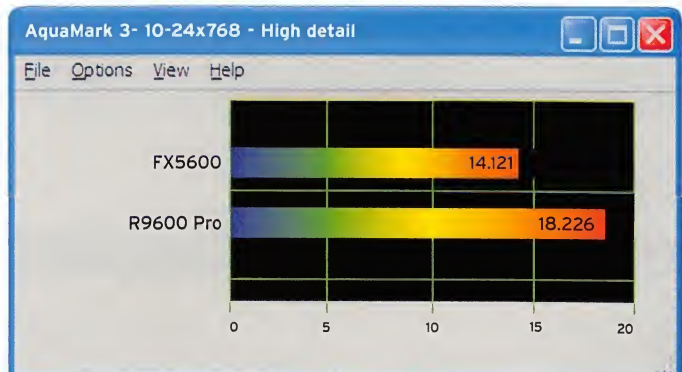
The default core/memory clock speed of this particular model is

400/300 (600MHz DDR), however, due to the fact that it utilizes 0.13-micron technology and 2.8ns memory, we were very hopeful that it could overclock much higher. For those that are new to overclocking, Gigabyte has included its very own overclocking tool, dubbed "V-Tool", making the process as simple as adjusting a few sliders. On our standard test bench as noted in PowerTools, we managed to push the card to a respectable 500/335 (670MHz DDR). Although this is still a decent overclock (especially the 25% increase of the core) and on par with what other R9600 Pro cards have been reaching, we can't help but be slightly disappointed with the memory due to the fact that it is rated to run at 350MHz.

Moving on to performance, for this review we decided to utilize the following benchmarking software: [H]ardOCP's UT2003 tool, AquaMark 3, and 3DMark 2001 SE. As per usual, we ran each benchmark at 1024x768, 1280x1024 and 1600x1200 where possible, and tested both anti-aliasing (AA) and anisotropic filtering (AF) performance. We would have loved to test using the new Half Life 2 benchmark, as online results show the 9600 PRO outpacing NVIDIA's top of the line 5900 Ultra when using HL2's pure DX9 mode, but unfortunately the release of this benchmark was delayed. For comparison purposes, we decided to throw an Abit GeForce FX5600 into the mix (thanks Altech!), as this is the 9600 Pro's main competitor.

As far as UT2003 is concerned, it is clear that although the FX5600 slightly edges out the 9600 Pro in regular conditions, the 5600's AA and AF implementations are clearly inferior. Couple this with the fact that the 9600 Pro beats the 5600 in the other tests (aside from the DX8-based 3DMark2001 SE), and there isn't a doubt in our minds regarding which is the better performer. While the Gigabyte R9600 Pro's software package is outstanding, its price of \$399 is rather high, especially considering the fact that the Abit GeForce FX5600 OTES, equipped with an extra 128MB of memory and an OTES cooling system, is over \$100 cheaper at \$280. Adding insult to injury is the fact that other 9600 Pro-based cards cost between \$250 and \$330, making it impossible for us to recommend the Gigabyte model on any level. The bottom line is that although the 9600 Pro is quite possibly the best mid-range graphics chipset currently on the market, in the form of the Gigabyte R96P it simply isn't worth it.

Asher Moses



## PCPP Score

A big disappointment. If it wasn't for its high price, this card would have received our Gold Award.

74



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# Sennheiser PC150

• Price: \$169.95 • Distributor: Syntec International (02) 9417 4700 URL: [www.sennheisercommunications.com.au](http://www.sennheisercommunications.com.au)



Mention the brand Sennheiser to any aspiring DJ and you'll soon hear about how "wicked", "sweet" and "banging" the headphones from this company are. This reputation has trickled down to the gaming market – go to any LAN and you'll probably find that the hardest of the hardcore are using Sennheiser headphones. So you can imagine our delight when Sennheiser sent us the PC150 cans, their first effort designed specifically for the PC gaming market.

They might not look too comfortable, with a large ring of puffy padding around each ear piece, so we were pleasantly surprised when they turned out to be a very comfy fit indeed. And the benefit of this padding is that they keep most of the sound inside the ear cup, so you won't be waking your flatmates with the 105mm Howitzer when you're flying the AC-130 in Desert Combat at one in the morning. The headphone cable

is a long 3 metres, which is always a good thing, and includes a volume control to allow you to select just how much your ear drums are going to punish you, without needing to use your PC volume controls.

Sound quality is exceptional, as you'd expect from a set of Sennheiser headphones. At maximum volume you'll be cringing in pain at each bullet strike, and yet they remain perfectly crisp and clear, with a healthy amount of bass. After firing up the Eve of Destruction mod with these headphones, and hearing things I'd never heard before (such as the echoes of a tortured VC soldier screaming "F!Sk you GI, Go home GI!"), it was actually hard to go back to my

beloved 5.1 speaker setup. Never thought I'd be saying that out loud.

Rounding out these sweet sounding headphones is the inclusion of a microphone, attached to a swivelling boom on the left earpiece. This makes use of noise cancelling circuitry to keep background noise out of your transmissions, and after a little testing with TeamSpeak we're happy to say that the recording

quality of this is up to scratch.

We don't often get excited about headphones, but the PC150s have changed all that. Extremely comfortable, with brilliant sound quality and a handy microphone, these headphones are well worth the asking price.

**Bennett Ring**



## SPECIFICATIONS

- noise cancelling microphone
- in-line volume control,
- 2 x 3.5mm jacks for mic and speakers

## PCPP Score

The pinnacle of PC headphones, at a very respectable price.

**92**

# Klipsch ProMedia Ultra 5.1

• Price: \$749.95 Distributor: Innovision [www.innovision.com.au](http://www.innovision.com.au) URL: [www.klipsch.com](http://www.klipsch.com)



Do Klipsch make the speakers that gamers want to die for? One thing a ProMedia set has never lacked is bass but this time they gave us not one, but two 8" side-firing woofers. The sub cabinet is noticeably larger than previous systems but hardly a problem, and it can double as a coffee table. To say that the Ultra 5.1 sub-woofers produce some bass is like saying Mark Skaife can drive pretty good. To say they are superb only hints at their sonic splendour. Sure these can make your ears bleed but the two 8" woofers are perfectly controlled and have superior, rich, deep bass.

The design of the cabinet is a 6th Order Bass Reflex enclosure. This fancy term means that the port is tuned to allow energy from the rear of the speaker cone to reinforce the low bass over a narrow range. The disadvantages of Bass Reflex are they roll off the rumble more quickly below the port frequency than other designs,

and below the port frequency the driver cone is unloaded because the enclosure no longer provides pressure for read-cone loading ('flap'). Strictly speaking for the speaker gurus, 6th Order means both sides of the cone fire into different size internal boxes, each turned with ports to different frequencies. (I'm feeling quite

'doctrinaire' today).

Klipsch have seen fit to provide a bloody good control unit. It has centre channel, sub, surround and master volume controls. Plug it directly into the back of the sub and you need never visit it again. The control unit also has an input plug for useful stuff like an MP3 player or minidisk, as well as a headphone jack. For movie testing I used PowerDVD and A Knight's Tale because of its fastidious sound effects and great music tracks.

I also played games ... lots of games.

I played games for a week instead of sleeping. Movies, music and games were a blast. At times, the eensy tweeters will sound 'bright': this is a term used by people we call "knobs" but it's the nature of tweeters and accurate. Do I wanna die for speakers? Sure, but only for the Klipsch ProMedia Ultra 5.1 speaker set.

**Stuart Calvin**

## SPECIFICATIONS

- Frequency Response: 25Hz-20KHz +/- 5dB
- Sealed 60W Satellites and Centre (3" fibre composite drivers) with spring clips
- MDF Subwoofer: dual 8" side-firing fibre composite drivers, 170 watts @ +/- 3% THD
- Tweeters: 25mm metalized polymer
- Low Frequency Crossover: 120Hz; High Frequency Horn by MicroTractrix
- Limiter Circuit for overload protection.

## PCPP Score

The clearest, cleanest, most exciting sounding, multimedia PC speakers for gamers we've ever heard.

**98**





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# SIIG Serial ATA PCI (SC-SAT212)

• Price: US\$49.95 • Distributor: SIIG Inc <http://onlinestore.siig.com/> URL: [www.siig.com](http://www.siig.com)

**S**o you want some SATA action, but you don't want to upgrade the mobo to do it? Then this puppy could be for you. Of course, you'll want to think about why you want SATA – other than the fact that it's the latest thing in IDE technology, and we all gotta have the latest thing, right?

Perhaps not. There's no denying that SATA's higher transfer rates than the other ATA standards certainly makes it attractive – it closes the gap between IDE and SCSI that much further, and when we're talking about PC performance, we all want to squeeze as much as we can out of our systems, but the expansion card option might not be the best way to go about it.

The Serial ATA PCI card supports SATA transfer rates up to 150 MB/s, which is faster than the 133 MB/s rate which ATA133 can manage. However, the 32-bit PCI bus slot is limited to 132 MB/s throughput, which means that as

far as your system is concerned, it can only effectively reference the SATA channels at ATA133 speeds – the PCI bus becomes a bottleneck. The only way that the full SATA transfer rates can be achieved if you attach two drives to the card, and transfer data between them.

In its defence, the card does have support for the 32-bit wide PCI bus, which can handle throughputs of 264 MB/s, so in this scenario you would be able to enjoy full SATA performance.

The main point on which this cards falls over is that of RAID support – namely, it doesn't have any. The vast majority of motherboards coming out onto the market with integrated SATA also have SATA RAID 0 or 1, or 0 + 1. This makes them much more attractive bases for your SATA devices than this RAID-less card.

Good motherboards with full SATA support are also very reasonably priced. To make this

particular piece of hardware equally attractive at the price, you would expect at the very least to have the full suite of SATA features made available. This not being the case, we have to recommend leaving the SIIG Serial ATA PCI off your wish list.

**James Bannan**

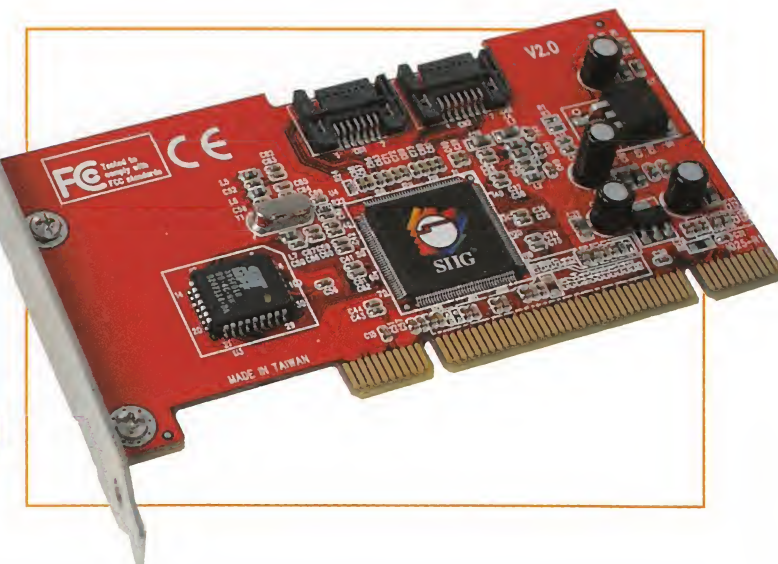
## SPECIFICATIONS

- Can connect two SATA hard drives, and provides data transfer up to 150MB/sec.
- Supports 32-bit wide PCI bus, SATA 1.0, PCI 2.2, and supports large hard drives over the 137GB limit.

## PCPP Score

Installs easily, bringing SATA to any motherboard – but neglects RAID. You're better off upgrading to a SATA motherboard.

**60**



# Altec Lansing VS-4121

• Price: \$199.95 Distributor: Innovision [www.innovision.com.au](http://www.innovision.com.au) URL: [www.alteclansing.com](http://www.alteclansing.com)

**T**he satellites comprising this 2.1 set have a down-firing mid-range driver. Yep, when I was fiddling to see if they swivelled or otherwise moved on their stands (without breaking), I had one of those "what-tha?" moments. Two micro-drivers face forward, mounted in a thin panel (they are full-fledged magnetic-driver speakers). The 3" mid-range driver is a cylinder behind the tweeters and faces down into the resting surface. The idea, according to Altec Lansing, is that the down-firing mid-range driver will disperse mid-range frequencies into the room, which can often be muffled as distance from the speaker increases. Mmm, yeah OK. The total power on this system is 31 watts but don't let that fool you. They produce very little hiss and other background noise when powered but no source connected. There's one thing I'd like to point out: the VS4121's subwoofer is not magnetically shielded. It must be kept at least a

half metre or so away from your computer to avoid damage from the sub's magnetic fields.

The bass and treble controls are built on the right satellite – bad luck if they're up a bit high. The classic direct-radiated, bass reflex 6" subwoofer – with a long-throw driver – provides impressive bass for multimedia purposes. The port is tuned well

enough to allow energy from the rear of the speaker cone to reinforce the low bass over a narrow range while the satellites do well with the added mid-range speaker and the tweeters for the highs. Although the subwoofer and micro-drivers share no common frequencies, the 3" mid-range driver almost acts as a crossover speaker, smoothing out the transition between lows and highs. The dual micro drivers in each satellite do an excellent job of

delivering the 'fine' sounds so dotingly crafted into games like Half Life. Bird noises and crickets, jungle and water sounds, as well as crash/booms were pretty darn good. The micro-drivers have a tendency to over reach at the expense of other background sounds but that and some lack of a little mid-range presence can be overlooked. A handy addition is a Console Gaming Y-Adaptor for box-freaks.

**Stuart Calvin**

## SPECIFICATIONS

- Front Speakers: 6 Watts/channel @ 4 Ohms
- Subwoofer: 19 Watts @ 4 Ohms
- System response: 25Hz – 15KHz
- SNR: @ 1KHz Input: > 73 dB
- Satellite Drivers: two 28mm full-range micro-drivers and one 3" mid-range driver
- Subwoofer Driver: one 6.5" long-throw woofer
- Ample colour-coded cabling
- Console Gaming Y-Adaptor
- Headphone Jack/MicroTrax
- Limiter Circuit for overload protection

## PCPP Score

Great speakers with great gaming sound, but quite expensive for a 2.1 setup.

**87**





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# Shuttle SB65G2

• Price: \$490 • Distributor: SATO [www.satotech.com.au](http://www.satotech.com.au) (02) 9899 633 • URL: [www.shuttle.com](http://www.shuttle.com)

While many small form factor (SFF) PCs have come and gone, Shuttle will always be known as the company that pioneered the sector, bringing to life the dream of converging what was once a whole lounge room full of monstrous equipment into a small, versatile beast. Now, why should you give a rats ass who came up with the idea first? Well, with each generation of barebones PC, Shuttle has had the chance to continually refine its design technique, ultimately resulting in a superior product being released onto the market. While the PCPP tech crew hasn't been too quick to jump on the SFF bandwagon, now that most newer units are more than capable of housing a gaming beast (due to the mandatory AGP slot), the idea has suddenly become significantly more attractive.

The latest unit to make its way through the slums of sunny Redfern and into our labs is the Shuttle SB65G2 - powered by none other than Intel's 865PE chipset. Due to the fact that it features an AGP slot, dual-channel DDR400, plenty of overclocking options and 800MHz FSB support, it is clear that this unit is targeted directly at the enthusiast market. Furthermore, onboard 10/100 LAN is provided by the Realtek 8100B

chip, while the CMedia 9397A controller enables 5.1 channel onboard audio. Two serial ATA ports are also present, however, the main feature which sets the SB65G2 apart from its competitors is the inclusion of a miniature 802.11b wireless Ethernet adapter - connected by a mini USB header with a small black antenna protruding from the back of the unit. With wireless networking rapidly gaining momentum within the last year, this could prove to be a very handy feature indeed.

With regards to external design, Shuttle has chosen the "G2" chassis for this particular unit, manufactured entirely out of aluminium and featuring a very solid, high quality build. This makes the SB65G2 ideal for those that frequently attend LAN parties, and the polished black finish should also be a hit amongst fellow ner..uhh, gamers. The chassis features an array of front ports, including two USB ports, a mini firewire port, and various audio jacks. The rear of the unit includes SPDIF optical in and out (for those with Dolby Digital speaker systems), as well as audio jacks (identical to those located on the front of the unit), four USB ports and a firewire port.

Moving inside, it is clear that Shuttle's engineers have had years

of experience in designing SFF PCs, as even with an entire system installed there is still plenty of room to move and a reasonably decent level of airflow.

Furthermore, you are conveniently able to access both the PCI and AGP slots at all times - a godsend for those that have worked with older SFF models in the past. Additionally, the thoughtful inclusion of a removable drive bay makes installation and manipulation a walk in the park. Well, almost. Due to the large amount of front ports, there are quite a few thick wires running through the chassis, which may complicate installation somewhat. That said, these can be easily removed and, after all, as with any SFF, there is an inevitable trade off when attempting to fit an entire system into such a small chassis.

The 220 watt PSU that comes bundled with the SB65G2 had no issues powering our beastly test bench equipped with none other than a Radeon 9800 Pro, 1GB DDR400 and a 2.4C Pentium 4 CPU - a relief to say the least. In addition, as far as cooling goes, the SB65G2 is equipped with two PSU fans and a rear exhaust fan, as well as an excellently designed heatpipe system to cool the CPU. Couple this with the SB65G2's overclocker-friendly BIOS that features extensive voltage and memory timing modifications, temperature monitoring, FSB adjustments up to 355MHz and the ability to lock your AGP/PCI speeds at 66/33MHz respectively,

and the SB65G2 is sure to be a hit amongst enthusiasts and overclockers alike.

Arguably one of the most important factors to consider when designing an SFF PC is noise output. Shuttle has done an outstanding job in its attempts to balance overclocking performance and noise levels, and the use of a heatpipe system to cool the CPU makes the SB65G2 virtually inaudible. In addition, performance was on par with a desktop system of similar specifications, and overclocking was just as impressive with our multiplier locked 2.4C hitting a whopping 255MHz FSB (3060MHz). If you're a hardware enthusiast or hardcore gamer looking at making the jump to SFF, you won't find a better solution than the Shuttle SB65G2.

Asher Moses



## SPECIFICATIONS

- 865PE chipset
- AGP 8X
- 1 x PCI slot
- 802.11b adaptor included
- CMedia 5.1 onboard audio
- Realtek 10/100 LAN
- Dual-Channel DDR400
- 2 x Serial ATA

## PCPP Score

aPut simply, this is without a doubt the best SFF unit we've seen yet.

# 95





# BATTLECRUISER MILLENNIUM

A D E R E K S M A R T S I M U L A T I O N



## GOLD EDITION

BE PREPARED FOR BATTLECRUISER MILLENNIUM: GOLD EDITION, THE ULTIMATE SPACE SIMULATION GAME.

NO BOUNDARIES FOR ENDLESS, TOP NOTCH GAMEPLAY.

#### GAME

- WHILE IN FIRST PERSON MULTIPLAYER MODE, JUMP INTO CRAFTS, FLY THEM TO OTHER PLANETS AND USE THEM TO KILL ALIEN SCUM!
- MANY STATIONS TO TRADE WITH, DESTROY, CAPTURE, DEFEND, ETC
- FULL INVENTORY OF FIRST PERSON GEAR, INCLUDING JETPACK, SNIPER RIFLE, ETC. WITH FATIGUE MANAGEMENT
- SOLO AND MULTIPLAYER MODES (UP TO 32 PLAYERS AT THE SAME TIME)

#### ENGINE

- NEW ADVANCED SPECIAL FX GRAPHICS ENGINE WITH FULL DX8 SUPPORT
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- HARDWARE TRANSFORM & LIGHTING, ETC. FOR SUPPORTED CARDS
- PLAY ONE OF 12 RACES OR 13 CASTES IN SINGLE OR MULTIPLAYER MODE



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# Pentium 4 3.2GHz Extreme Edition

• Price: \$2,000 • Distributor: Synnex [www.synnex.com.au](http://www.synnex.com.au) • URL: [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)

When AMD kicked sand in the face of Intel with the FX-51 (reviewed in last month's PCPP), we knew it wouldn't be long before Intel would release a retaliatory CPU to stick it to AMD. But we couldn't have anticipated just how quickly Intel would release its competitor to the FX-51, the Pentium 4 Extreme Edition.

Considering Intel is relatively forthcoming with details about its upcoming processors, gamers were taken completely by surprise when the Extreme Edition was paper launched on the 23rd of September – the exact same day that the Athlon 64 and FX-51 were launched. Intel hadn't mentioned a single word about this processor until the IDF (Intel Developer Forum) a week before, preferring to keep it secret; no doubt in the hopes that they'd steal some of AMD's 64-bit thunder.

Just like the FX-51, the Extreme Edition has its crosshairs aligned squarely on the foreheads of PC gamers. It's nice to see the microprocessor companies finally admitting that a large proportion of their high end CPUs are used primarily for blowing shit up (virtually of course), and now they're even tailoring products to our needs. But if there's one thing these companies need to realise it's that gamers are a pretty frugal bunch, so laying out \$1500 or so on the latest processor isn't going to happen. Yes, this is another incredibly expensive CPU, with the latest rumours putting it at around \$2,000, but at least with the Extreme Edition you probably won't need to buy a new motherboard and registered memory (provided you're already running a Socket 423 Pentium), unlike the FX-51.

So what makes this processor "Extreme", other than its pricing?

How does a crazy 2MB of L3 cache sound to you? We were impressed by the 1MB of L3 cache on the FX-51, and didn't imagine that Intel would double this anytime soon. Additional cache is a relatively expensive method of increasing a CPU's performance, which is why this chip will cost you an arm, leg and probably even a kidney.

Other than the 2MB of L3 cache, the first Extreme Edition is identical to the Pentium 4 3.2GHz. It runs off the same 800MHz frontside bus, is manufactured on the same 0.13 micron process and includes the lovely HyperThreading feature that power users find so handy. In fact, it's apparently just a Xeon server CPU with a faster frontside bus and higher clock frequency, but Intel wouldn't officially verify this for us. The EE is one toasty little chip, pumping out 94W of heat, yet it's still quite happy to run perfectly with Intel's reference heatsink, and thankfully these don't crank out much noise.

While we couldn't overclock the FX-51 at all, the Extreme Edition was a different, albeit underwhelming, story. Thanks to the ability of most Intel based motherboards to overclock the frontside bus in a matter of seconds, we were able to push the EE to 3.52GHz, which is exactly 10% faster than its default speed. And that was as far as she'd go, even with unhealthy doses of extra voltage. This suggests that the current P4 architecture doesn't have much headroom left, hence the upcoming Prescott Pentium 4. We tested the 3.2GHz

EE P4 in an 875P-based Abit IC7 motherboard, with 1GB of DDR400 memory running in dual channel mode. All other components and drivers were identical to those used in last month's FX-51 review. As you can see from our benchmark results, the EE has regained most of the ground that the FX-51 stole from Intel – at least when it comes to gaming. In two of the tests the EE edged out the FX-51, while the AMD CPU remained ahead in the other two. However, in the tests that the FX-51 won, the lead was much greater than when the P4 won, suggesting that the FX-51 is still a slightly faster processor.

With the imminent release of the Prescott, we'd have to recommend holding off any processor purchase decisions until the end of the year, by which stage FX-51 prices will have subsided and the Prescott Pentium 4 will be available. If you're really itching to buy a new processor right now, the EE offers performance comparable to the FX-51, without the need for a high end motherboard and registered memory, but is anyone seriously going to pay two grand for a gaming processor?

**Bennett Ring**



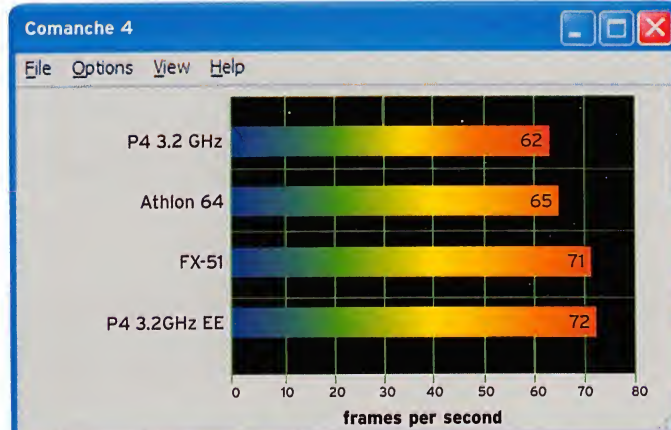
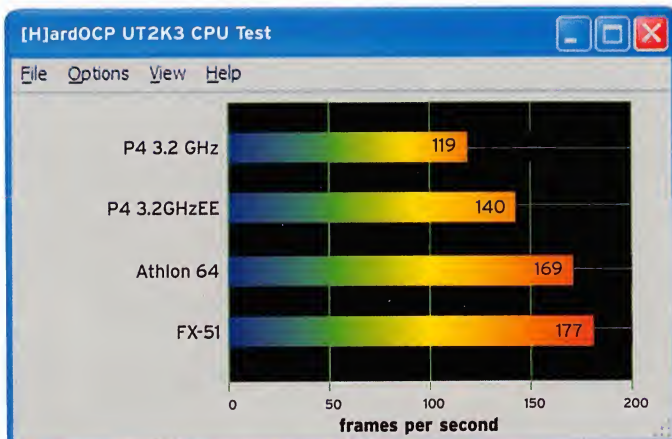
## SPECIFICATIONS

- 2MB L3 cache
- HyperThreading
- 800MHz frontside bus

## PCPP Score

As fast as the FX-51, without the need for an expensive motherboard or registered memory. But two grand for a chip? Dream on.

# 80





# Athlon 64 3200+



• Price: \$771 • Distributor: Altech [www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au) (02)9735 5655 URL: [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)

**D**o us aussie media types emit some sort of repelling odor? Or is it just our unmaintained facial hair and albino tan that scares AMD's PR representatives away every time we request a review sample? In either case, it seems as though AMD has given up on the Australian market, as there have been no Athlon 64 review samples sent out to any Australian media. Weird. All ranting aside, however, you'll be pleased to hear that we did in fact finally manage to get our hands on one, no thanks to AMD of course. AMD has been advertising and promoting the Athlon 64 for well over a year now, and suffice to say, we made sure that we had a spare change of pants (or two) upon popping our sample in to the test bench.

While we have already taken a look at the Athlon FX-51 last issue, the Athlon 64 is likely to be much more attractive to gamers, due to the fact that it does not require expensive registered memory to operate and the processor itself is significantly cheaper. Let's just hope that AMD does not hold the Athlon 64 back out of fear of the product encroaching on its Athlon FX sales. Directed at the mid-range sector, the Athlon 64 will make its debut at a speed rating of 3200+ (running at 2GHz), featuring an integrated single-channel 64-bit memory controller with a maximum transfer rate of 3.2GB/sec. The local memory controller allows the memory and CPU to interact directly, bypassing the northbridge and as a result latency is reduced. Due to the fact that the Athlon FX-51 features a 128-bit memory controller and thus provides double the bandwidth it will certainly be interesting to see how much of a performance difference results.

Like the Athlon FX-51, the Athlon 64 features an L1 cache of 128KB, a whopping 1MB of L2 cache, and HyperTransport technology. Other similarities between the two include a core voltage of 1.5V, 105.9 million transistors, a die size of 193mm<sup>2</sup>

and a 0.13-micron process technology. The increase in cache should provide a significant performance boost, while the voltage reduction means that the chip will run cooler than previous AthlonXP models, thus hopefully yielding increased overclocking results. Finally, both support 64-bit applications and operating systems, while being optimized for the AMD64, SSE, SSE2, 3DNow! and MMX instruction sets as well.

As you can see, there really aren't many differences between the design of the Athlon64 and AthlonFX at all. In fact, we can only count three - clock speed, packaging (754-pin for the Athlon64, 940-pin for the AthlonFX), and most significantly, the memory controller.

While all of the above sounds great on paper, if you decide to make the jump to the Athlon 64 you will still need to purchase a brand new motherboard due to the change in pin-count, which will set you back a significant amount of money. Alternatively, the Extreme Edition Pentium 4 also reviewed this issue is backward compatible with previous Pentium 4 motherboards, as the only difference between it and previous P4 models is the addition of a 2MB L3 cache. Ultimately, the factor which will decide the Athlon 64's fate is its performance, and whether or not its cost is worth the upgrade.

The Athlon 64 3200+ was tested on our regular PowerTools test bed, with the exception of the motherboard which we swapped for the Gigabyte K8VXP, and the memory which was 1GB of OCZ DDR500 (running at DDR400). For comparison purposes, we also threw in the Athlon FX-51 reviewed last month, the Pentium 4 3.2 EE reviewed this issue, and the regular Pentium 4 3.2 to give you a good idea of how the Athlon 64 stacks up against its main competitors.

As you can see, the results

were fairly consistent, with the Athlon 64 convincingly beating out the Pentium 4 3.2GHz in most test, but falling just short of the FX-51 and P4 EE. Being a mid-range processor, these figures were a lot better than we expected, and the reason for the Athlon 64 performing slightly slower than the FX-51 can simply be put down to the fact that it is running 200MHz slower, and only has a single onboard memory controller. Overall, we were very impressed with the Athlon 64's performance.

As far as overclocking is concerned, we were fairly disappointed in this respect, due to the fact that we only achieved a 5% increase of 100MHz using AMD's stock cooling solution. While this could easily be put down to our particular CPU or motherboard, looking at other reviewer's results, we haven't yet seen anything higher than a 10% increase, and that was with watercooling. Bummer.

The Athlon 64 3200+ comes in at an RRP of \$771 (boxed version),

while the Athlon FX-51 is priced at \$1423 (boxed) and the P4 3.2 EE and P4 3.2 can be had for around \$2000 and \$1120 respectively. While the new pin count on the Athlon 64 would usually be a significant issue for most users, at such a comparatively low price of \$771, one can easily purchase both an Athlon 64 processor and the most expensive motherboard on the market whilst still having plenty of money left over for the price of a single Pentium 4 3.2GHz Extreme Edition processor. Whichever way you look at it, if you're building a high-end machine or upgrading your existing PC, you can't lose with the Athlon 64 3200+.

Asher Moses

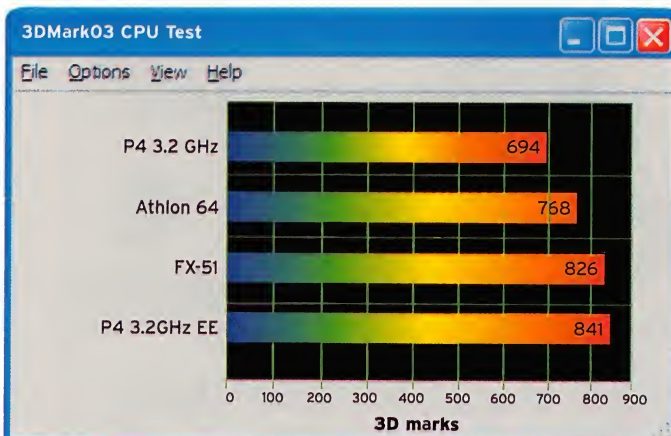
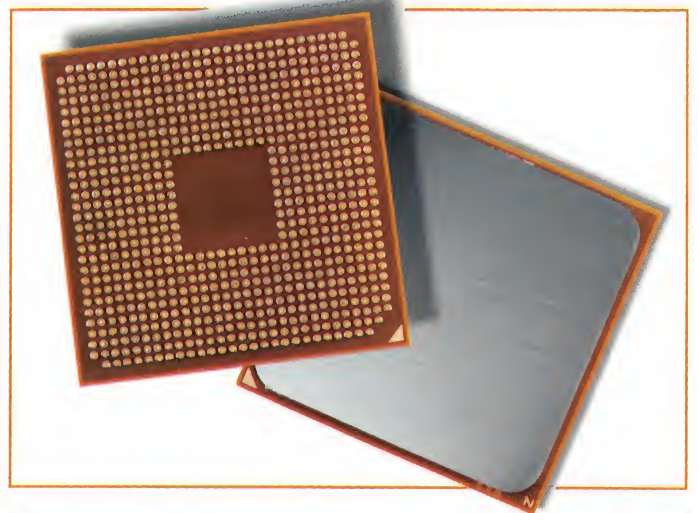
## SPECIFICATIONS

- 64-bit compatible
- 2GHz frequency
- 1MB L2 cache
- Socket 754
- 0.13 micron process

## PCPP Score

Excellent performance at a competitive price.  
If only it was a better overclocker

# 92





## Bennett Ring

# PowerTools

While it would make our jobs a heck of a lot easier if we could review hardware based on the shininess of the packaging it arrives in, we're pretty sure our beloved readers are a little more interested in how the hardware actually performs. Which is why we have the PC PowerPlay PowerTools - batteries not included.

If you're anything like us, you probably don't give a rat's arse if Word will open three seconds faster on the new

Pentium 64, or if you can compress a zip file more speedily using DDR6-8000 memory. Nope, this is PowerPlay, so it's all about how well your games will perform.

Our PowerTools are broken into two categories, videocard tests and CPU/motherboard/memory tests, and you'll notice that most of these are based on real world game engines. We spoke to Intel, AMD, NVIDIA and ATI about which games to use to benchmark our hardware, and

after tossing out their biased recommendations settled on the following applications for the majority of our tests. Of course, every now and then a unique piece of hardware will arrive that can't be tested properly using these applications, and in these circumstances we'll use the most appropriate benchmarking software.

We also use test benches (a fancy way of saying a PC outside of a case, waiting to electrocute unsuspecting

hardware newbs), standardised hardware platforms that ensure our benchmark results can be compared to each other month after month. As better benchmarks are released, we'll strive to include these in the PowerTools section, and with the imminent release of a few big name DX9 titles, you'll see a couple of changes over the coming months. But until then, here are the benchmarks that we'll be using to put new hardware through its paces.

### CPU Tests

#### 3D Mark03 CPU test

Nobody can deny that this CPU test is a nice way to give processors a thorough workout. And hey, it's easy to use and free - 'nuff said.

#### Jedi Knight 2

We couldn't ignore a benchmark that includes lightsabres. We run this test at low resolution (640x480), with texture details lowered, and geometry details maxed out.

#### [H]ardOCP Unreal Tournament 2003 test 2.1

We run the CPU test of this benchmark at low resolution, and it's one of the finest indicators of CPU performance available.

#### Comanche 4

It sucked as a game, but as a CPU/motherboard/memory benchmark this is a beauty. We run at 640x480 resolution to make sure it's the CPU that's carrying the load.

### Videocard tests

#### Quake 3 Arena v1.32

This OpenGL golden oldie is the

most prolific game benchmark around. We run this test at 1024x768, 1280x1024 and 1600x1200, with all graphics settings at their highest.

#### 3DMark2001 SE v330

An excellent DirectX 8.1 benchmark, we're still waiting for games to look this bloody good. Unlike its newer sibling, 2001SE doesn't have a reputation for being incredibly biased. We run this at the same resolutions as the Q3A test.

#### Serious Sam: Jaguar Demo

Throw dozens of detailed enemies into a massive, gorgeous level and you've got a benchmark that is guaranteed to make your videocard howl in pain. Once again, we test at the same resolutions as the Q3A test.

#### [H]ardOCP Unreal Tournament 2003 test

Crank up the resolution and set the benchmark to High Quality mode, and you've got a test that will bring both ATI and NVIDIA products to their knees. This is also the test that we use for anisotropic filtering and anti-aliasing tests, at a resolution of 1280 x 1024.

### TEST BENCHES

#### Intel Test Bench (x2) Intel Pentium 4 2.6C

HIS RADEON 9700 PRO  
[www.akatech.com.au](http://www.akatech.com.au)

Corsair 2 x 256MB XMS3200LL  
DDR400  
[www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au)

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB  
ATA100 Hard Drive  
[www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)

ABIT IS7 865PE motherboard  
[www.abit.com.au](http://www.abit.com.au)

TOPOWER 470W PSU  
[www.auspcmarket.com.au](http://www.auspcmarket.com.au)

Mitsubishi Diamond View  
2115e 21" monitor  
[www.mitsubishi.com.au](http://www.mitsubishi.com.au)

Microsoft multimedia keyboard  
and optical mouse  
[www.microsoft.com.au](http://www.microsoft.com.au)

Windows XP Professional  
[www.microsoft.com.au](http://www.microsoft.com.au)

#### AMD Test Bench (x1) AMD Athlon XP 2600+

HIS RADEON 9700 PRO  
[www.akatech.com.au](http://www.akatech.com.au)

Corsair 2 x 256MB XMS3200LL  
DDR400  
[www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au)

Seagate Barracuda 7200.7 160GB  
ATA100 Hard Drive  
[www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)

ABIT NF7-S  
[www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au)

TOPOWER 470W PSU  
[www.auspcmarket.com.au](http://www.auspcmarket.com.au)

Mitsubishi Mitsubishi Diamond  
View 2115e 21" monitor  
[www.mitsubishi.com](http://www.mitsubishi.com)

Microsoft multimedia keyboard  
and optical mouse  
[www.microsoft.com.au](http://www.microsoft.com.au)

Windows XP Professional  
[www.microsoft.com.au](http://www.microsoft.com.au)

#### Image Quality testing:

We also use a Sony G520 21" CRT monitor for the image quality testing of video cards.



[www.akatech.com.au](http://www.akatech.com.au)



[www.corsairmicro.com](http://www.corsairmicro.com)



[www.auspcmarket.com.au](http://www.auspcmarket.com.au)



[www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



[www.abit.com.tw](http://www.abit.com.tw)



[www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)



[www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)



[www.hightech.com.hk](http://www.hightech.com.hk)



[www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au)



[www.sony.com.au](http://www.sony.com.au)



[www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au](http://www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au)



## Stuart Calvin

# Decrypt

**T**alk is cheap and so is disk space. Do yourself a favour and go get a big, fat, fast hard-drive just for fun. When talking about hard-drives, I prefer the term "disk" instead of hard-drive (discs are those round, plastic thingies with a hole in the middle) and ATA instead of IDE but I'll use IDE/ATA anyway.

### IDE:

Integrated Drive Electronics, is generally speaking, one type of drive control. IDE drives were the first to popularise integrating the logic controller onto the hard disk itself. "IDE" is a misnomer but IDE can be considered the unofficial "universally popular name" for this hard-drive technology. The correct name for the IDE standard is ATA. Enhanced IDE disks are found inside most of our PCs.

### ATA:

Advanced Technology Attachment or more popularly - AT Attachment. The ATA-5 Standard introduced the 80-wire IDE cable for the 40-pin board/disk connection enabling ATA66 disks (Ultra-DMA Mode 4) to function more reliably. UDMA modes were also first defined in this standard. Currently we're at ATA133 or UDMA Mode 6.

### SCSI:

Small Computer Systems Interface is another type of drive operation and interface. Apple computers have been SCSI based for yonks. SCSI is typically for high-end use in servers and mission-critical workstations, but has crept into home-use.

### PIO:

Programmed In/Out Mode is a weenie technique whereby the CPU and support hardware directly control the transfer of data between the system and the disk. As I said in my very first PCPP article, this Mode is no fun. It hogs your CPU and doesn't understand how to directly access system memory (RAM). Chuck out any PIO Mode hard-drives or CD/DVD-ROM units.

### DMA:

The use of Programmed I/O Modes is a hindrance to performance. As a result, focus was placed on the use of Direct Memory Access Modes. In particular, bus-mastering DMA on the PCI bus became mainstream due to its efficiency advantages.

### Partition:

Partitioning the disk is the act of dividing it into volumes. This is one of the first things done when setting up a new disk, because partitions are one of the major disk structures that define how the disk is laid out.

In fact, you must partition a disk, even if only partitioning it into a single volume, before you can format and use it.

### MBR:

Every disk must have a consistent starting point where key information is stored about the disk, such as how many partitions it has and what sort of partitions they are. There also needs to be somewhere that the BIOS can load the initial boot program that starts the process of loading the operating system. The place is called the Master Boot Record.

### FAT & NTFS:

File Allocation Table and New Technology File System are logical structures and software routines used to control access to the storage on a disk system. Operating systems use different ways of organising and controlling access to data on the disk, and this choice is basically independent of the specific hardware being used. The same disk can be arranged in many different ways, and even multiple ways in different areas of the same disk.

### RPM:

5400, 7200, 10,000, 15,000 are all indicative rotation speeds of various individual hard-drive platters. Generally speaking, the faster the better. Faster than 7,200 rpm was once the preserve of SCSI but now Serial-ATA and some IDE/AT disks spin at 10,000 rpm. vr00m!

### Bits & Bytes:

Disks are typically marketed in terms of billions of bits. An 80GB disk with 80 billion bits is actually

74.506 'real' Gigabytes. \*sigh\*\*\*  
Cache or Buffer To improve performance and increase data rate, disks utilise a small amount of fast solid-state memory to store the most frequently used data. This memory is called cache. There are two types of cache memory organisation: look-ahead and write/read. The 2MB and 8MB figures quoted by disk manufacturers is actually a buffer and is not cache memory or even a cache. It's a buffer!

### Ultra-ATA133:

This is performance to match the PCI Bus. At 33MHz you can only count on a theoretical 133MB/s performance maximum. With overheads, timing efficiencies, error checking and the like, data transfer is nowhere near 133MB/s. A conservative figure will show a transfer efficiency of 62% based on a 32Kb block of data, so the actual IDE/AT data rate via an IDE cable connection will clock well under 133MB/s.

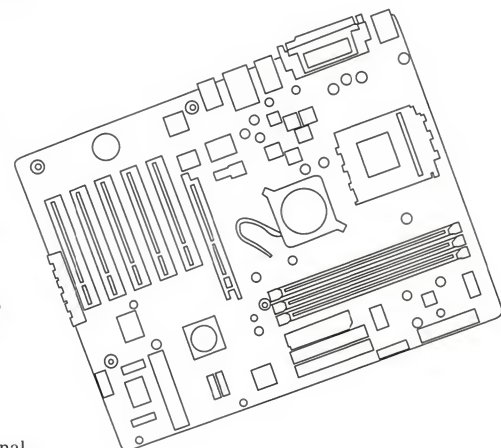
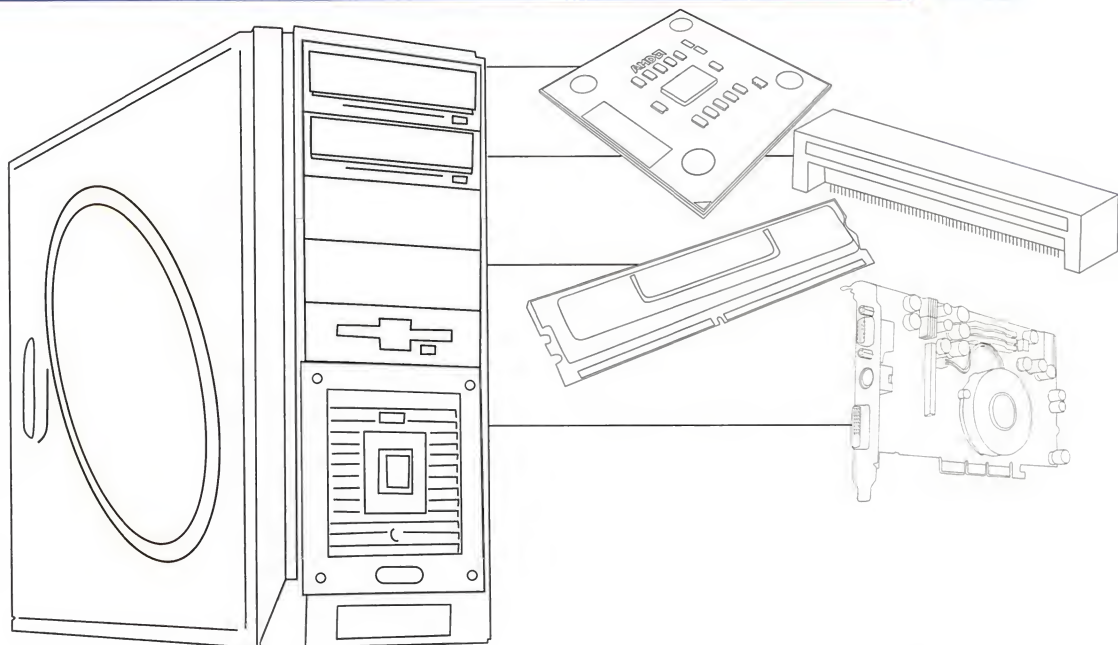
### Serial-ATA:

this is the new-wave, attachment technology that overcomes the limitation of the PCI Bus and promises big. Only an integrated controller or a 'native' chipset on the system board will be able to achieve the current 150MB/s standard and the planned 300/600MB speeds. Think 'native' before acquiring that new motherboard.

**Capacity barriers:**  
have been a fact of the personal

computing since its beginnings in the early 1980's. At least 15 capacity barriers have occurred in the storage industry over the last 20 or so years.

- PC/XT barrier of 10MB
- FAT12 barrier of 16MB
- DOS 3.x barrier of 32MB
- DOS 4.x barrier of 128MB
- 1,024 Cylinder barrier of 528MB
- DOS / 4,096 Cylinder barrier of 2.11GB
- FAT16 Partition Size barrier of 2.15GB
- 6,322 Cylinder barrier of 3.26GB
- Phoenix BIOS barrier of 3.28GB
- 8,192 Cylinder barrier of 4.22GB
- 240 Head Int13 Interface barrier of 7.93GB
- Int13 Interface barrier of 8.46GB
- Win95 / Common BIOS Limit barrier of 32.0GB
- 65,536 Cylinder barrier of 33.8GB
- ATA Interface Limit barrier of 137GB





# THE BEAST



## In association with Altech Computers

I'd like you to all welcome the Athlon FX-51 into our Beast machine. Sure, the upgrade future for this platform is almost non-existent, as the Socket 940 it uses will probably be obsolete within 6 months (for gamers at least), but The Beast is all about being the most powerful PC you can find, and the FX-51 currently reigns supreme as the finest processor available for gaming. The other machines haven't changed at all - we toyed with the idea of whacking an Athlon 64 into the Mutant, but sadly its low overclocking headroom meant it wasn't suitable.



## CPU, MEMORY AND MOTHERBOARD

### AMD Athlon FX-51 CPU

Goodbye Intel, hello AMD. The FX-51 is bloody expensive, but the fact that it's the fastest gaming processor around meant we had no choice but to fit out The Beast with this speed demon.

**\$1423** [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)



### Abit KV8-MAX3

A hella board in a hella package that includes everything from an extra USB back plate to black rounded IDE cables. And it's powered by VIA's KT800 chipset - Serial ATA RAID goodness!

**\$358** [www.abit.com.tw](http://www.abit.com.tw)



### 1GB Corsair TWINX-3200 ECC Registered

The FX-51 demands only the finest in registered memory, and a Gig of the stuff for a mere \$630 is quite simply a bargain. It's Corsair as well, so it must be pretty good, right?

**\$630** [www.corsairmemory.com](http://www.corsairmemory.com)



### Zalman 7000A-Cu

The Beast is so chunky, so wild and untameable that you need a real man's cooler stuck on the top of your mighty CPU. Zalman delivers, offering a chunk of metal that performs well and isn't too screamingly loud.

**\$82** [www.zalman.co.kr](http://www.zalman.co.kr)



### Antec TruePower 550W

With 550 watts of blistering power you can plug in as many crazy case fans, cooling systems and front-mounted LCD panels as you like and still enjoy smooth, reliable gaming.

**\$233** [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)



## VIDEO, AUDIO AND CONNECTIVITY

### GeCube RADEON 9800XT PRO 256MB

With more onboard memory than some people's whole PC, the latest in the RADEON family will get your FSAA performance up and keep it up.

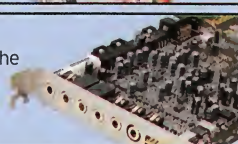
**\$890** [www.gigacube.com.tw](http://www.gigacube.com.tw)



### Creative Soundblaster Audigy 2 Platinum

The most powerful consumer-level soundcard on the market. Support for every sound format, including Dolby 6.1 surround.

**\$415** [australia.creative.com](http://australia.creative.com)



### Creative Inspire 6600 6.1

Let your soundcard handle all the decoding and plug these cheap but powerful speakers into the ports on the back. An extra rear channel beefs your gaming surround!

**\$264** [australia.creative.com](http://australia.creative.com)

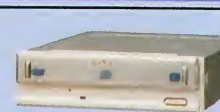


## STORAGE AND OPTICAL

### Sony DRU510A DVD +/- R/RW

Almost but not quite cheap enough for mere mortals to own, this Sony drive will burn DVDs and CDs at 4X and 24X respectively - tasty!

**\$413** [www.sony.com.au](http://www.sony.com.au)



### Samsung 816BRPS 16x DVD-ROM

It's straight up and down, it's cheap, it's fast, it works well and you need it to copy - sorry, back up - DVDs using your nifty writer.

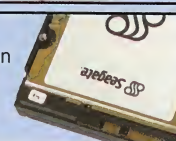
**\$63** [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



### 2x Seagate 120GB Serial ATA in RAID 0

Thanks to the IC7-G's support for Serial ATA RAID, you can run your 120GB in super-fast RAID 0 mode for even quicker load times - and to be damn cool too, of course.

**\$518** [www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)

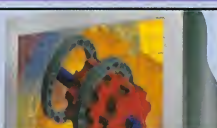


## DISPLAY, INPUT AND COSMETICS

### 21" Sony FD Trinitron G520

Until large LCD catches up with small LCD the Beast will stick with dependable, mature, established CRT. And the G520 is one of the best in the business.

**\$1960** [www.sony.com.au](http://www.sony.com.au)



### Antec PlusView 100AMG

It may not be the Rolls Royce of cases but it's roomy, has a built in side window and it has all of Antec's various quick access features. Take note, Lian-Li.

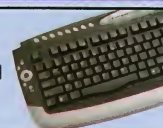
**\$171** [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)



### Logitech Elite Black

Smooth mechanism, funky styling and support for both PS/2 and USB make this keyboard the right choice. Real men use ergonomic keyboards though, don't forget.

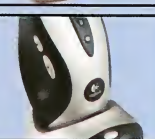
**\$88** [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



### Logitech MX700 wireless mouse.

Normally we wouldn't recommend a wireless mouse for gaming, but the MX700 is an exception due to its high refresh rate.

**\$169** [www.logitech.com](http://www.logitech.com)



## BEAST VALUE:

## \$7677

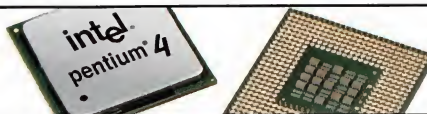


# THE MUTANT

Thanks to the popularity of overclocking and tweaking, we've included this machine to show you exactly what you can get away with for not much outlay. Tweaked to within an inch of its life, this is the machine we DO own, versus the Beast, which is the machine we'd like to be able to AFFORD to own.

## Intel P4 2.6GHz "C" at 3.3GHz

Truly the most overclockable of all modern CPUs, the 2.6C can be run a staggering 800MHz over its stock speed. With the standard Intel HSF. Now that's value. \$380 [www.intel.com](http://www.intel.com)



## Abit A17

The latest 865PE based from Abit, the A17 has a very handy feature in that you can overclock your system directly from the Windows desktop. Which means you needn't delve into the confusing BIOS options ever again. \$231 [www.abit.com.tw](http://www.abit.com.tw)



## Logitech Elite Black keyboard and MX700 mouse

If it's good enough for the Beast, it's good enough for the Mutant. Sure, both of these components aren't exactly cheap, but you can't skimp on the interface between you and your box of love. And for a wireless mouse, the MX700 is a ripper. \$257 [www.logitech.com.au](http://www.logitech.com.au)



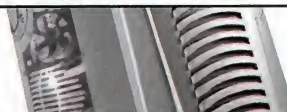
## Antec TrueControl 550W

What could be groovier than a PSU that comes with a 5.25" front plate with dials and knobs for controlling fan speed plastered all over it? Nothing, that's what. \$229 [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)



## Antec PlusView 1000AMG

What's good enough for the Beast is good enough for the Creature, especially where the price is right. And with this machine, you'll definitely make the most of the side window. \$171 [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)



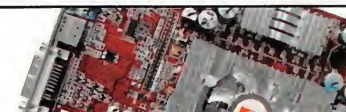
## 512MB Corsair TWINX-3200LL

Ah the half-gig sweet spot, is there nothing finer? This RAM is beefy enough to support a bit of tweaking, so perhaps you can drag a little extra performance out of it? \$297 [www.corsairmemory.com](http://www.corsairmemory.com)



## GeCube RADEON 9800 PRO 128MB

Amusingly, the video card is the single most expensive component of the Creature. It's hard to believe that you can now get a RADEON 9800 PRO for a mere \$645, considering just how blazingly fast this video card is. \$645 [www.gigacube.com.tw](http://www.gigacube.com.tw)



## Zalman VGA Heatpipe Cooler 80C-HP

Bolt this mighty thing to your video card, attach the included fan, and who knows what insane core speeds you can achieve? \$60 [www.zalman.co.kr](http://www.zalman.co.kr)



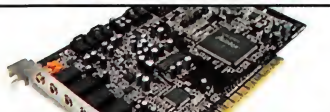
## 120GB Seagate IDE

The first upgrade HDD I ever bought was 6GB and cost \$447. So this is pretty damn cheap. Only standard IDE, but at this price we can't complain. \$174 [www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)



## Creative SB Audigy

Lacks a few of the features found on the Audigy 2, but only the ones that don't really have much effect on gaming. There's a lot of soundcard here for not much cost. \$159 [australia.creative.com](http://australia.creative.com)



## Creative Inspire 6.1 6600

They're so cheap they're good enough for the Creature too. No decoder, no difficult optical inputs, just ordinary wires plugging in to a set of extraordinary speakers. \$264 [australia.creative.com](http://australia.creative.com)



## Samsung 816BPRS 16x DVD-ROM

Same as the Beast, this drive is fast, dependable and has a slightly funkier facade than most of the beige monstrosities currently available. \$63 [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



## Samsung 252BRNS 52x24x52 CD-RW

Wow, these things sure got cheap didn't they? Burn CDs in hardly any time at all thanks to 52x writing. Backup all your digital LAN shots for posterity. Pose nude... no wait, don't. \$70 [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



## 19" Samsung 995 Dynafiat

Cheaper than the video card but still a lot of sleek, flat monitor. Nineteen inches is pretty much the minimum for decent gaming, and we can't wait until a 16ms LCD this big costs this much. \$522 [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



## 4x Antec USB Light Sticks

Pep up the Creature with a few light sticks. Stick 'em on the monitor, in the case, wherever you like. USB powered and respond to sound - clap on, clap off! Other cosmetic additions to the Creature are limited only by your imagination. \$132 [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)



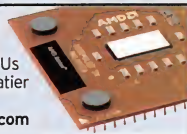
**MUTANT VALUE: \$3654**

# the beastie

The cheapest but worthiest PC of all, the Beastie is for all of use who need gaming, the web and to generally have fun without worrying about overclocking or our bank account.

## AMD -Athon XP 2500+ Barton

The cheapest CPUs keep getting meatier and meatier. \$163 [www.amd.com](http://www.amd.com)



## Abit NF7

nForce2 is good and this implementation of it is even better. \$150 [www.abit.com.tw](http://www.abit.com.tw)



## Antec Lanboy

Includes a 350W power supply, window and carry strap. \$185 [www.antec-inc.com](http://www.antec-inc.com)



## 512MB Corsair PC-3200

A budget PC with half a gig of RAM. All praise the open market. \$199 [www.corsairmemory.com](http://www.corsairmemory.com)



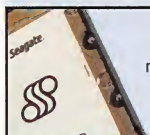
## GeCube RADEON 9800

Yes, a 9800 in a budget system. Holy shit batman. \$484 [www.gigacube.com.tw](http://www.gigacube.com.tw)



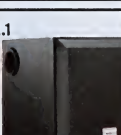
## 60GB Seagate IDE

Plenty of room for not much cash. Dependable and reliable. \$149 [www.seagate.com](http://www.seagate.com)



## Creative Inspire 2400 2.1

Plug 'em in to the nForce2's onboard sound and it's MP3-tastic! \$90 [australia.creative.com](http://australia.creative.com)



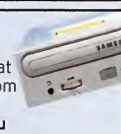
## Samsung 816BPRS 16x DVD-ROM

Good enough for all the PCs on this page, swift and reliable. \$73 [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



## Samsung 252BRNS 52x24x52 CD-RW

Cheap, fast, reliable, what more could you want from a CD-RW? \$70 [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



## 17" Samsung SyncMaster 753S

To think flat screen 17" monitors were once worth \$800. I love the future. \$235 [www.samsung.com.au](http://www.samsung.com.au)



## KME Wireless Keyboard and Mouse

A sleek combo, wire free for mad ranting around the room after losing at CS. \$64 [www.kmepc.com](http://www.kmepc.com)



**beastie value: \$1862**

So, you want one of these three fine beasts? Luckily, all of these components are available at **Altech Computers** [www.altech.com.au](http://www.altech.com.au) 02 9735 5655





# SETUP



WRITE TO SETUP AT:

Setup  
PC Powerplay  
78 Renwick St  
Redfern  
NSW 2016

setup@pcpowerplay.com.au



It's a total bitch finding a processor, RAM and video card for the Apollo... chipset.

## FASTER DAMN IT!

**Q** What is the max CPU, RAM and video card I can run on my VIA Apollo Pro133? Can I run DDR video cards?!

Rick

**A** A quick check of the VIA website, can tell us a lot about individual chipsets although it's up to the motherboard vendor as to what they actually implement. It also depends on what the vendors do to the PCB circuitry and BIOS over time. On the first release of the chipset there was support for: a 133MHz Memory Bus; 66/100/133MHz Front Side Bus; AGP 2x/4x interface; ATA 33/66 support; AC-97 Audio; MC-97 Modem; and support for four USB ports. LAN and ATA100 disk support was added by many vendors in later iterations of the Apollo 133Pro. The fastest CPU you can run may well be a PIII-1.40GHz Tualatin, possibly a PIII-1.13GHz Coppermine, but a Coppermine PIII-933MHz is more likely the limit. You may get away with a Celeron 1.3GHz but not the 1.4GHz unless you possess a B-Stepping motherboard. You're also looking at a 1GB RAM limit, maybe 2GB, of PC-133 memory but some boards accept PC-150. There may be DDR video adaptors that'll run on your board, as DDR has nothing to do with AGP specs, but only if the vendor has implemented the underlying AGP technology to match the chosen video adaptor. A lot of 'if' and 'maybe' that can only be confirmed by a visit to the motherboard vendor's website.

## LOST MHZ

**Q** My computer that I have at home currently is an Acer T300 and is supposed to be a 2.40GHz machine. I have modified it to a small degree, by installing extra disks and a GeForce4 MX440, but the computer is only running at 1.7GHz. The BIOS says it's jumperless and can change without fiddling, but nowhere in the BIOS can I change multiplier and FSB. I have included all the relevant CPU data in an HTML file. Please help me, as I paid for a 2.4 and have been ripped off out of 700MHz.

Andrew Munford

**A** I love detective work! Because these machines work out of the box, what did you do to cause the problem?! Have you contacted Acer Australia? Which 2400MHz CPU do you have? You know there are 17 of them ranging from a 400MHz FSB "2.40" (SL68T/B0/0F24) through 533MHz "2.40B" (SL6PC/C1/0F27) to a 800MHz "2.40C" (SL6WF/D1/0F29). From your attachment I see that you have a C1 stepping and a CPUID of 0F27 which is found on the 400MHz and 533MHz FSB processor. The multiplier for the quad-pumped 2.40GHz/400MHz is 24x (24 x 100MHz = 2400MHz). The multiplier for the similarly quad-pumped 2.40B/533MHz is 18x (18 x 133MHz = 2400MHz). Note the reported figures for your PC: Clock multiplier 18.0; Front Side Bus Frequency 99.6 MHz; Bus Speed 398.4 MHz. I know that your motherboard is a 533MHz FSB unit with DDR333 and an SiS chipset so your reported 1792.8MHz is the result of a

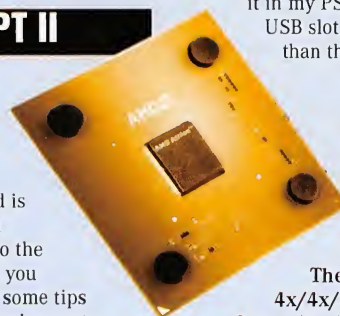
533MHz FSB CPU running on a 400MHz FSB. For some reason the 533MHz FSB setting has not kicked in. The Phoenix BIOS has been modified by Acer and I'm not familiar with it. I suggest selecting "setup defaults", rebooting and seeing what happens. There is also a new BIOS for your Aspire "R01C0.exe" available from <http://support.acer.com.au> which may help.

## LOST MHZ PT II

**Q** I have an AMD Athlon XP 2.4GHz. My system is only running at 2000MHz in the BIOS. The FSB speed is on 133/33MHz and I can't seem to get it to the sticker speed. Could you please help me with some tips to get my system running up to the right speed.

Jason

**A** No current AMD processor runs at a stock 2400MHz. The fastest AMD is the Barton core XP 3200+ at 2200MHz. I suspect you have an Athlon XP 2400+ running on a 266MHz FSB which does have an actual processor frequency of 2.0GHz. You are forgiven but please give yourself a quick blow to the head before proceeding.



## CHEAP DVD LOVIN'

**Q** I was just at my local computer store and to my disbelief I saw a LITEON DVD burner for \$249.00. I was soo close to buying it but then why are other burners still \$350 + hmmm. Why is it so cheap? So I am asking if you guys could review the LITEON DVD burner in your next issue. Also, I have an optical mouse with USB plug and I am running it in my PS2 port to save a USB slot. Is the USB better than the PS2?

Gwilym

I know that by the time you read this that an 8x LITEON DVD burner will be on the streets.

The LDW-411S is DVD 4x/4x/2x R/+R/-R (dual-format), while the LDW-401S is DVD 4x/4x +R/W. I suspect you spied the single-format 401S. The only useful purpose a USB connected mouse serves is if it runs off a low-speed hub on your desk if the PC is placed well away from your gaming space. Other than that, why waste a high-speed USB port? Do budget KVMs have a USB port for mouses?! No! What's wrong with using a perfectly good PS/2 port?

## FAN MAIL

**Q** Expecting a few yes or no answers here :) Are Molex Power Splitters an effective way of giving me some extra molex power connections? Is it safe to use a few of these (not that I plan to do so)? If I wanted to use a Fan Controller to control the speed of my fans, would a fan, such as an Enermax which has its own speed dial, be incompatible with a controller because it can be manually done on its own? Speaking of fans, is there a difference between an exhaust fan and an intake fan? Do you purchase the same fan and adjust it to the job it has to do? If so, how is that done?



If you're really serious about cooling, whack one of these babies into your case

**A** Yes or no? You got it: Yes, Yes, No, No, Yes and check which way the wind blows.

Nick





## TO DX9 OR NOT

**Q** I have a P4 1.6GHz, an MSI 6524 motherboard, and 256 MB of SDRAM. I'm looking into buying a new graphics card and want the best card I can get for my budget (under \$200) but I want it to be DX9 compatible. I was thinking of a GeForce4 (I assume it's DX9 compatible), as your cards in the Beastie are always incompatible with DX9.

James

**A** DirectX 9 support is found in the NVIDIA FX 5200/5600/5900 and ATi RADEON 9600/9700/9800 class of GPUs. There is a price premium for DX9 support and outright speed so you might consider DX8 support (certainly better than DX7) for the foreseeable future. The Australian site [www.razorprices.com](http://www.razorprices.com) will find a card near your price range. Nearly all 5200s and 9600s are under \$200. For just on \$200 you will find a 128MB Gigacube ATi Radeon 9600 and for slightly more, an FX5600.

## VIDEO MEMORY

**Q** I have just installed a Power3D GeForce4 graphics adaptor. It says on the card and the box that has 64MB of DDR memory but when the PC boots and I open DirectX diagnostics the NVIDIA diver program it says it's only 32MB. I am running WinXP and the card is an MX440. I know my motherboard is only capable of handling 4x AGP but I do not know what the card is, could the card be 8x? Is this why it's only showing 32MB (8/4=2, 64/2=32); I think this is unlikely.

Chris Sullivan

**A** The adaptor may be a 32MB unit. What's on the receipt? Is the 64MB square on the box marked with a cross or a tick? Not sure? Reboot the PC and watch the upper left corner of your screen. If you see "32MB", take the adaptor back to your vendor with the speed of a thousand startled gazelles and rehearsed threats of harm.

## CRASHTASTIC

**Q** I seem to have have a problem in regards to my system crashing with a error message of bad\_pool\_caller. Basically it's a new system that comprises an Intel 3.06GHz and an ASUS P4P800 Deluxe. My system simply crashes and reboots even in the first 10 seconds of logging on. After countless scannings, readings, un/installing software and hardware, sleepless nights I finally found the the problem occurs when HyperThreading is enabled in the BIOS. When it's disabled the whole system works fine with no crashes or reboots. Now my my sleepless nights became worst, after knowing that \$700 3000MHz CPU cpu cannot run HT. Now I'm running WinXP SP1 and all the critical updates, what else do I need?

GRIM CASTOR

**A** Is this machine still under warranty? The BAD\_POOL\_CALLER error is typically caused by a recalcitrant device driver or software. Try BIOS 1010 from the ASUS site because many hardware issues (read drivers) have been sorted in 1009 and 1010. As a last resort, search your system for lomDisk.sys and your registry for lomDisk. If you don't use Iomega products then burn the file and registry references.



## UPGRADE ME

**Q** I just bought a v-1.1 MSI 6341 mainboard. Will it run a GeForce4 Ti4600? What DDR does it support up to? The highest CPU? Also it has an unusually long AGP slot why is that?

Maunsell Henry

## VINYL TO DIGITAL

Do you know if it's possible to copy LP records onto CDs? A friend told me that you need some special gear (cables, software, etc) to do it, but I'm not sure. Can it be done and if so how?

Justin Simonis

Hey buddy, this is an extraordinarily, hard k0re gaming publication, not some lift-out from a crystal-wristed, custard-ankled sewing magazine. The only music we hear is the agony of enemy defeat. On the other hand, burning is dear to my heart. I use DCart Audio Restoration Tools mainly because it has its own I/O setting and a level meter to show actual levels of recording. You'll need mini-jack to RCA phono cables to connect everything up. I will assume that you will use a moving magnet or moving coil stylus cartridge (all high quality cartridges are one of these two types). The signal from these cartridges is low in level (typically <5mV for moving magnet and <0.5mV for moving coil) so it must be boosted to about 100mV needed to drive the line level inputs. It should also be RIAA equalised (applied when the LP is mastered to get around mechanical limitations of the LP system) which must be reversed so as to provide a flat



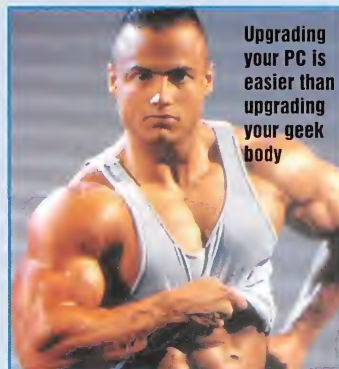
frequency response for the line input. If you have a receiver or stereo amplifier with a "phono" input, that input will perform this task, and the resulting line level output will be available on the receiver/amplifier tape output. Once you have a line level signal, it needs to be digitised and recorded onto the PC's hard disk. Note that for a typical 40 minute LP, you'll need about 500MB of disk space, and depending on what software you use, you might need another 500MB for temporary files. Google for CoolEdit 2000 or Wave Repair to do the data management and may I recommend Feurio! for burning. "I can play through the computer speakers, but can't record to hard disk": There is a difference between which inputs are made available to the soundcard's output, and which one is made available for recording. Look here <http://www.delback.co.uk/pcaudiofaq.htm#record> before emailing me.

**A** The dual Socket-A processor K7D Master will run all AGP2.0 compliant video adaptors including all 4x GeForce

4s. It supports up to the Athlon MP 2800+. The AGP slot is long because it's a

"Pro" slot but it will run Pro or non-Pro cards. AGP Pro provides the steroids for graphic cards with more than 64MB of high speed VGA memory, higher graphic chip clock-rates and additional graphic chips. The board will run PC2100 RAM and luckily MSI recommends a range of brands. You've also got two 64-bit/66MHz PCI slots at 3.3V or 5V.

The beauty of a 66MHz PCI slot is increased bandwidth with network cards and disk controllers benefitting the most from the extra oomph. Some 32-bit/33MHz cards will perform better in these slots, some won't and some can actually fall back in performance. A true 64-bit/66MHz card will, of course, perform as described.





# THE PCPP INTERVIEW

Liquid Entertainment broke into the limelight with its fresh take on the RTS genre - the intelligent, moody and detailed Battle Realms. Now it's finishing up work on Vivendi's War of the Ring which is looking like it going to be anything but a well-known license slapped onto a generic RTS gameplay.

**Timothy C. Best** talks to Liquid Entertainment bigman Ed Del Castillo about getting away from vanilla design.

## Curriculum Vitae

Name: **Ed Del Castillo**

Title: **Co-Founder, President and Creative Director**

Company: **Liquid Entertainment**

Location: **Agoura Hills, California**

Projects: **Siege, Magic Candle, Bloodstone, Ultima series, Ultima Online, Command & Conquer, C&C Red Alert, Sid Meier's Gettysburg, Battle Realms, War of the Ring**

Battle Realms and Lord of the Rings both go into new RTS territory. Why isn't there more innovation in overpopulated genres like RTS?

The first reason is that people don't think of it. They get so mired in the pre-existing conventions of a real-time strategy that they think, 'well, no other real-time strategy has done this so we don't need to.' They are not even thinking beyond what already exists ... a lot of people are very good at imitating but not very many are good at innovating.

So is there anything you can do to try help your chances of coming up with something fresh?

Well, I think that the second reason there isn't more innovation is that there isn't a constant re-evaluation of what we can achieve.

You have some games that are carrying a legacy, whether that be good or bad, and that legacy has certain ways of doing things and they don't necessarily re-examine it. It's kind of the 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it,' mentality.

Every year our technology is becoming more powerful and if you think of us as wizards, every year we are capable of weaving more and more complex spells. I think people get so comfortable throwing a fireball that they think, 'let's throw a bigger fireball,' and it takes someone to pull away from that whole thing and say, 'You know what? I think I can summon a whole phoenix. Why the f@#k am I still throwing a fireball?' I think it takes someone like that to re-waken people's mentalities of, like: 'Whoa! Is that what's possible now?'

Is that a goal of yours?

I think that's one of the things that we've tried to do - and I'm not saying we've always managed it - but we've always tried to.

**One of the saddest parts of this business is that people in the business don't think about games any more. As soon as five o'clock rolls around, they couldn't give a shit about games**

Like how?

When we start up a new game, we like to think of it as a totally new thing, even if it's a continuation of a series, we try to think of it from scratch. We're all gamers here and we say, 'You know what? If we were going to spend 50 bucks or 60 bucks on a Lord of the Rings RTS what would we want to see?'

When we look at things through those eyes, it really lets us redefine what we're doing, instead of saying, 'what can we cram in in a year?'

In the past you've been critical of games like WarCraft 3. I can see why. Its approach of gradual evolution is at odds with your design theory.

Exactly. I think that there's a time and place for that, I just don't think we're there yet. I think that we're

getting to a point, for all types of games, where, in the next five to ten years, people aren't going to be able to tell the difference between 5 and 7 hundred polygons.

When that starts happening, the art and the technology are going to start mattering less and the content and the innovation in games is going to start mattering more. How it's executed, how well the interface talks to the player, how well the units talk to the player, how well it flows, how fast is it, how slow is it, does it have weak spots, does it have a constant pace of play ... you know?

There are going to be things that people aren't even beginning to think about yet because they are so busy trying to have a tech demo.

John Carmack said a similar thing about graphics engine technology maturing to a point that so you don't need a new one for every game just to keep up.

That's exactly right and it's not hard to see how that will work.

If you want an example of what happens when that starts to happen, let's look at the movie business. Everybody shoots with the same camera; everybody shoots with the same lighting. In other words, everybody shoots with the same equipment, which is what the engine is really and they have the same talent pool of actors.

The only difference is execution ... things like getting the shot to look right, the timing and getting the emotion.

Those all have to do with the people who create the content and how they do it, not the equipment. Sure, Matrix did something new with its whole little camera twirly- thing that it does but it's a 'gee whiz' gimmick, that, if that movie had sucked, wouldn't have carried it ... but the movie didn't suck.

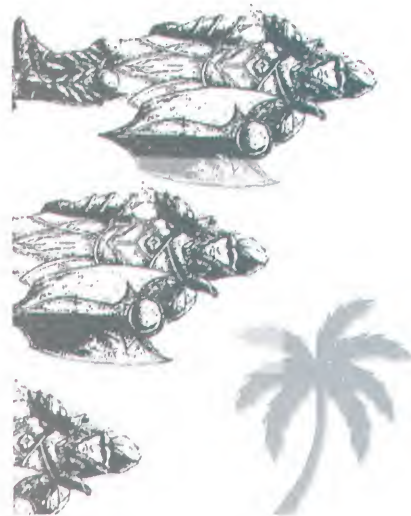
Would it be fair to say that you have some fairly strong views on this?

You're only scratching the surface. I play more RTSs than anything else, and I get in some RTS or other game every night and I see that as my classroom ... that's my home work. Lucky me, right?

But, people don't look with fresh eyes at what we can achieve.

I think one of the saddest parts of this business is that the people in this business don't think about games more. We have a lot of people in our business now, that as soon as five o'clock or seven o'clock rolls around they couldn't give a shit about games. I spend a good two or three hours after I'm done working reading books on how to shoot film. Why? Not because I want to shoot film but because I want to make games better. I play board games, not just because I like them, but because sometimes the game dynamics carry over and you can learn stuff there.

I've read a lot about game design and talked to a lot of people and you can really tell which developers really care about design as a craft and you're obviously one of them. The people who are hungry to improve this industry, I believe, are going to turn it into the number one entertainment industry in the world. I really do believe that. I also believe that you have to believe to make it happen.





# BATTLE REALMS

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Francisco

Cruz

San Diego

Los Angeles

San Diego

Calif

Modesto

Fresno

Bakersfield

San Bernardino

Riverside







# FLASHBACK

Games and tech remembered with Anthony Fordham

## WAR IN MIDDLE EARTH

**Developer:** Synergistic Software  
**Genre:** 'Realtime' Strategy  
**Graphics Mode:** EGA  
**Sound:** PC speaker  
**True 3D:** No  
**Operating System:** DOS  
**Released:** 1988

While it would be nice to think that the recent LOTR movies have sparked a new interest in JRR Tolkien's slightly overwrought fantasy universe, there have in fact been a steady stream of Lord of the Rings flavoured games released down the ages.

This was one of the better ones. War in Middle Earth, or WIME as it was fondly known, was the result of a blinding flash of inspiration on the part of developers Synergistic - a Middle Earth games shouldn't be a flouncy RPG chock full of plump hobbits, it should be a grand

sweeping epic of military conquest. And so WIME was. Most of the game was played from an overhead map perspective, where you - appointed as supreme commander-in-chief over all hobbits, dwarves, elves and men - positioned armies at strategic points and then watched as your battle plan unfolded.

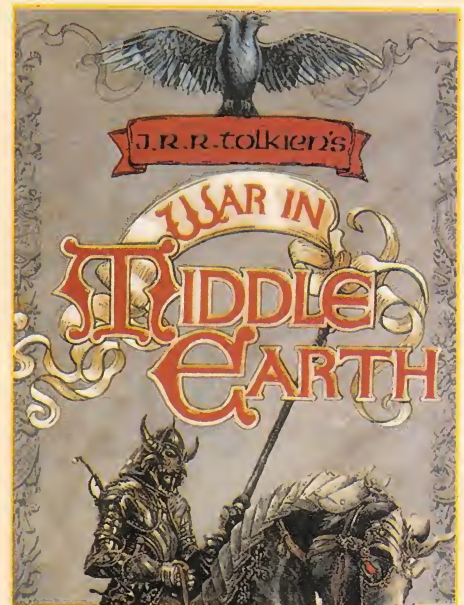
Sure, the battles weren't exactly interactive, but they made good use of cutting-edge EGA graphics technology and splashed all 16 garish colours liberally around the screen. Even though the game was about battles, Synergistic still understood

that characters were - and remain - an integral part of any Middle Earth experience. Gandalf, Frodo, Aragorn and the rest of that unlikely pack therefore took the form of bonus powerups.

Encountering them or recruiting them to your armies caused certain events to be triggered, or helped you move closer to your final goal of a big showdown on the slopes of Mount Doom.

The other thing about WIME is that it was realtime, sort of. Armies slowly crawled across the game map until they ran into each other and triggered the non-interactive battle mode.

Amazingly - and something we may have forgotten in these days of Radeon 9800 Pro powered graphical do-hickery - this limited realtime aspect created a game that was far more immersive and engrossing than other turn-based EGA equivalents on the market at the time.



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Will War of the Ring be as good? Let's just say it will take more than DirectX 9.0a powered graphics to impress this writer. WIME forever!

### WHY WIME DESERVES TO BE REMEMBERED

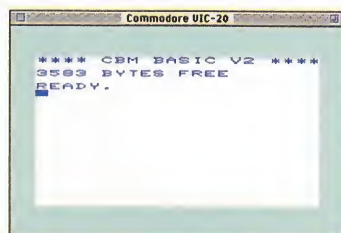
- First non-Hobbit focussed Middle Earth game
- Correctly realised LOTR is about big battles, not characters
- Gave a new perspective on the granddaddy of all fantasy worlds
- Dabbled in realtime for extra immediacy

## FLASHBACK TECH

### COMMODORE VIC-20

**Manufacturer:** Commodore  
**Significance:** For many, their first taste of computing. Thanks to schools and colleges buying roughly nine grillion of them, everyone got to play with one over the holidays. First affordable colour computer capable of playing games.  
**Cost:** US\$299  
**Released:** 1981

If you were born sometime toward the end of that great decade we called the seventies, then odds are in the early or mid eighties you spent at least one Christmas holiday parked in front of the TV with this beige box on the carpet in front of you, excitedly tapping in line after line of BASIC code from those Usborne books that promised a rollicking text adventure in only 10,246 lines. The VIC-20 was, for so many, their first real introduction to home computing. It had an exciting 70s look, could output 16 colour graphics at 176x184 (about the



resolution of your average PDA with 1/4096th the colours) and even go beep at various different modulations. The VIC-20's pedigree made it essentially a gaming machine - after all the Video Interface Chip after

which it was named was designed by Commodore to be used in arcade machines. Unfortunately, no one was interested in it so the company said stuff youse all, took a leaf from the Clive Sinclair book of Making a Bazillion Dollars and built the chip into a portable plastic case with a joystick port.

The machine was so cheap because Commodore made all the chips at its own plant, MOS Technology. The VIC-20 was powered by the awesome MOS 6502 which ran at a staggering 1MHz. That's ONE MILLION operations per second, the results of which were stored in 3.5K of RAM. Unlike its contemporaries such as the ZX81, it had a composite video port allowing use with ultra-expensive computer monitors, but still included a modulator box allowing you to use it with your regular TV. Games on the VIC-20 could be loaded into RAM either through a data

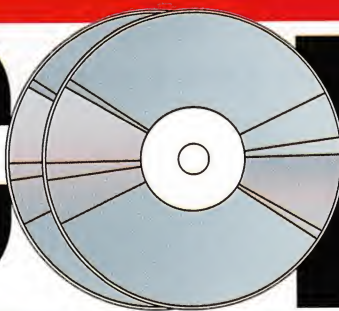


recorder (tape), a ROM cartridge like the consoles of the distant future, and it even had a super-expensive 5.25 inch external floppy drive.

No one seems to know for sure what the 20 stood for, not even Commodore 'VIC Czar' Michael Tomczyk. But what we do know is that for many of us the VIC-20 was our first true gaming machine, and not even the massively much more powerful and soon-to-be-ubiquitous Commodore 64 could take that away from it.



# THE DISC



## REQUESTS

We welcome requests so please forward your requests to Disc Producer Amos Hong via email at [cdgod@next.com.au](mailto:cdgod@next.com.au) or write to PCPP DVD Requests, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016



It's once again come around to my favourite time of the year, Christmas. This is the season, when everybody is filled with Christmas cheer and don't seem to care that their credit cards are way over the limit. It's also the time of the year when gamers like you and I are on the look out for some choice games that hopefully we'll receive as Christmas presents, so I've tried to be helpful and included some demos and game trailers that may help you with your decision.

This month's Spotlight includes a massive demo, a free game and heaps of trailers to keep you busy over the holidays. For all you fans of Everquest, we have included the Lords of Everquest Dawn Brotherhood demo. We have also included a FULL FREE GAME, the award winning Hidden & Dangerous, which also includes the expansion pack Devil's Bridge and a game editor. This month's trailers include some awesome movies. Check out the extended trailer for The Matrix: Revolutions and the trailer for the highly anticipated third instalment of the Lord of the Rings. Also, included are some impressive game movies like Far Cry, The Sims 2 and Sim City 4: Rush Hour. Don't forget to have a look at the T3 movie, which features the governor of California.

The Demos this month include some superb games. With the release of LotR: The Return of the King, there

has been a number of games based on Tolken's work being released. Last month we had a demo of the official game of the movie, this month we have the LotR: War of the Ring and The Hobbit demos. Get ready to travel through the mystical world that is Middle Earth. The disc also includes a number of sports demos, included are the newest releases of the FIFA, NHL and Tiger Woods series.

Wow, some of the mods that are around are HUGE in size. As you can image we can't put all of these mods in Modspus, so don't be disappointed if you don't see your favourite mod on the disc, because I'll be including them when there is some room on the disc. This month, we have the full install of Desert Combat v.4J. This mod is a massive 573MB. I've also included some other mods such as G.I. Joe, Kanonball and Hell in the Pacific that will spice up your games.

Once again, the Bunker is full of fun stuff like wallpapers, skins, games and other cool stuff. The Patches section includes a number of fixes and enhancements for some of your favourite games including Madden 2004 and TRON 2.0. Check out the latest version of AutoDivX player in the Utilities page. Hope you all have a safe and merry Christmas.

Amos Hong - Disc Master  
[cdgod@next.com.au](mailto:cdgod@next.com.au)



## DVD CONTENTS

### SPOTLIGHT/ MOVIES

Lords of Everquest  
Hidden & Dangerous Deluxe  
TRAILERS  
Anachronox - Part 10 of 13  
Far Cry  
Matrix Revolutions

Need for Speed Underground  
Once Upon a Knight  
LotR: The Return of the King  
The Sims 2 Trailer  
Sim City 4 Rush Hour  
T3: War of the Machines  
XIII Multiplayer

### DEMOS

FIFA Soccer 2004  
Halo



Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004  
Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring  
Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death  
The Hobbit  
Worms 3D  
MoH: Allied Assault  
Breakthrough  
NHL 2004  
Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown  
Space Colony  
XIII MP

### MODS PLUS

G.I. Joe [BF:1942]



Kanonball v1.0 [HL]  
Desert Combat v.4J [BF:1942]  
Hell in the Pacific [MoH: AA]  
Plus Modlife  
Napoleonic Total War [MTW]

### PATCHES

Age of Mythology v1.07  
Halo v1.0 to 1.01  
Madden NFL 2004  
TRON 2.0 v1.030  
TRON 2.0 Level Editor  
Star Trek: Elite Force II v1.1  
Robin Hood: DotC v1.01

### ROM'S BUNKER

Heaps more wallpaper, free games, Winamp skins, map packs and addon files for all your favourite games. Come get some!



### UTILITIES

3DNA Desktop 1.1 - a  
Abandon Loader - f  
Adaptec ASPI Layer 4.71.2 - f  
Adobe Acrobat Reader 6.0 - f  
Advanced Zip Repair 1.6 - s  
AutoDivX Player 3.6 - f  
Burn4Free 1.0 - f  
Catalyst Radeon Display Driver 3.8 794 - f  
Complete Online Gaming System - f  
DivX Pro Bundle 5.1 - a  
DirectX 9.0b - f  
Download Accelerator 5.3 - a  
GetRight 5.02 - f  
G Spot 2.21 - f  
HyperSnap-DX 5.3 - s  
IsoBuster 1.4 - f

JaAlbum 3.6.1 - f  
KaZaa Media Desktop 2.5.2 - f  
LEET Speak 1.2 - f  
NVIDIA drivers 45.23 - f  
Ostat v0.31 (build 240 rel 4) - f  
PC-cillin 2003 - d  
PowerPoint Viewer 97 8.0 - f  
SANDRA Plus 2004 - s  
Stuffit 7.0 - f  
VDM Sound 2.0.4 - f  
VIA Hyperion 4-in-1 4.47 - f  
Windows Media Player 9



[w/ PowerToys] - f  
Windows Movie Maker 2 - f  
WinRAR 3.2 - s  
Winzip 8.1 - s  
Your Uninstaller! 2003 Pro 3.9.315 - s  
Zip Repair 1.0 - f  
ZoneAlarm 3.7.202 - f

## CD CONTENTS

### CD 1 DEMOS

FIFA Soccer 2004  
Halo  
Hidden & Dangerous Deluxe [Free Game]  
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004  
Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring



### CD 2 DEMOS

Judge Dredd: Dredd vs. Death  
The Hobbit  
Worms 3D

### MODS

G.I. Joe [BF:1942]  
Kanonball v1.0 [HL]  
Plus Modlife  
Napoleonic Total War [MTW]

### PATCHES

Age of Mythology v1.07  
Halo v1.0 to 1.01  
Madden NFL 2004  
TRON 2.0 v1.030  
TRON 2.0 Level Editor

### UTILITIES

Auto DivX Player 3.6 - f  
HyperSnap-DX 5.3 - s  
JaAlbum 3.6.1 - f  
PC-cillin 2003 - d  
SANDRA Standard 2004 - s





# 4x4 Coin Collector 3D

Proving genius and copious amounts of cash don't mix



**F**raser Island is not a location usually associated with state-of-the-art PC games development, especially since there are no exciting corporate high rises, funky terrace offices or converted pre-dotcom crash technology parks on its endless beaches. Instead, there's just a constant susurrus of wind on sand, the howl of hundreds of Range Rovers and new Volkswagen Touaregs racing up and down the beaches, the slow creak of thousands of majestic eucalypts swaying in the breeze, and the occasional popping sound of a park ranger with a .22 culling another dingo.

And yet, up and coming startup developer Same Differential had chosen Fraser as its home base, and so it was to Same Diff's tent city that a rusted and rattling long-wheelbase Landcruiser brought me.

Unlike some of the other developers I've had the misfortune to encounter over the three or so years the Boots and I have been forced to cover Australia's third and fourth tier game projects, Same Differential actually had a lot of money behind it, thanks to lead designer Jake Spitsbergen having a very rich father.

"He's a counterfeiter and money launderer based in the Whitsundays," Spitsbergen told me quite unabashedly a few minutes into the inevitable conversation that had started when I asked how the company could afford a next-generation solar array to power its impressive collection of high end notebooks and portable DVD burners.

"My father taught me a lot of what I know about running a business," Spitsbergen went on. "You need to steal a concept, copyright the hell out of it, and then build a really middle of the road application so you'll still make a decent bunch of money but no one will think it's worthwhile trying the same thing. That's how Microsoft won its monopoly, you know."

I asked why the company was based on Fraser Island, where no permanent structures are allowed.

"It's a tax thing, I can't really explain it now," Spitsbergen replied, "except to say that running a four million dollar business without any bricks-and-mortar type infrastructure gives us a considerable advantage over our competitors. And I mean considerable."

I nodded sagely and tried to turn the conversation back toward the actual game. Various expertly designed promo posters pinned up inside the main tent showed what appeared to be an expensive four wheel drive howling along a remote beach while the driver - a bespectacled nerd - tried to both maintain control of the vehicle and admire what in turn appeared to be a coin collection in a likewise expensive display case.

"Basically we saw how a lot of games involve collecting coins," explained Spitsbergen, "for bonuses and extra lives and et cetera. However what concerned us was that this coin collecting aspect had typically been implemented fairly haphazardly. So we thought, why not make the

coin collecting a central part of the game? As in, actually implement a serious coin-collecting sim."

"And the four wheel driving?" I asked.

"Oh yes, and I like four wheel drives as well."

At this point Spitsbergen guided me to a 17" notebook in front of which sat a young man who bore a striking resemblance to the bespectacled nerd in the promo posters.

"This is Zeus Andalusia, our senior designer," explained Spitsbergen, "he's been implementing the coin collection database and online coin exchange system. In secret. So much in secret that not even I have seen it. He's a genius, and I like to give genius space to create. Now, for the first time, he will explain the system to us."

"Uh yeah," said Zeus, clearly on cue, "well here it is, the main screen. This is connected to our eight meg microwave DSL link to the mainland so we're all online here. You can buy coins on our secure server and have them delivered to your online identity. The way we make money is by charging you more for the coins than they're actually worth, so if you want a five cent piece you pay us ten cents."

"And I presume the rare coins are a lot more expensive," I interjected.

"Rare coins?" asked Zeus.

"Aren't there rare and unusual coins, foreign coins, really old coins of historical interest, you know, the kinds of coins that people would actually want to collect?" I asked, despite the fact I already knew where this was heading.

"I didn't know people liked collecting rare coins," shrugged Zeus, "I thought it was all about spare change, you know, having a lot of coins."

"You're a genius Zeus," said Spitsbergen.

"Um," I said. "Have either of you actually collected coins before? See, you're supposed to have rare and unusual coins, and foreign coins. That's the whole point of it. This here, this is pointless. You've totally missed the point of coin collecting."

"You're an idiot Zeus!" screamed Spitsbergen. "How could you embarrass me like this in front of the press?"

I looked around but there weren't any press in the tent with us. Suddenly I realised he was

talking about me.

"Hey now," I said, "It's okay, I'm not a proper journalist, I just write the funny page at the back of the mag."

"The funny page?" squealed Spitsbergen, turning first his anger on me and then an unusual shade of purple, "The FUNNY page? We ask for a journalist to come and preview our MAGNUM OPUS, we pay for the flights, we put on a fabulous dinner and even ship in some high class prostitutes - clean ones - for the weekend and they send us the guy who writes the FUNNY PAGE?" He actually honest to God tore at his hair and gnashed his teeth. Scared as I was of his towering fury at that moment, I felt I had to defend myself.

"I have good boots," I managed, as I backed out of the tent onto the endless beach. I looked around wildly for an avenue of escape. The Pacific Ocean looked back, mocking my infinitesimal smallness.

"Where's my machete?" howled Spitsbergen from inside the tent. "I'm going to cut you for this Zeus, and then I'm going to cut that idiot with the stupid footwear!" Suddenly the whole structure collapsed, burying Spitsbergen, the hapless Zeus and thousands of worthless virtual coins under the best part of six tonnes of reinforced canvas. The collapse revealed Victor Ninox, my crazy ex-third flatmate standing in the dunes holding a penknife and half a guy rope.

"The thing here," he said, "is not to demand to know why I would bother stowing away first in the wheel well of a Virgin Blue 737, then in the boot of a Cessna, and finally strapped to the rear axle of a Landcruiser just to get a free holiday on Fraser Island, but instead to thank me from saving you from yet another homicidal type situation that has sprung from this endless dance of death you seem to engage in with the rich and privileged."

"Well yes," I replied as various shapes lunged and thrashed under the ruin, "but did you bring any beer?"

There was a long and dangerous pause.

"Yes," he said.

So at least we had a decent holiday.





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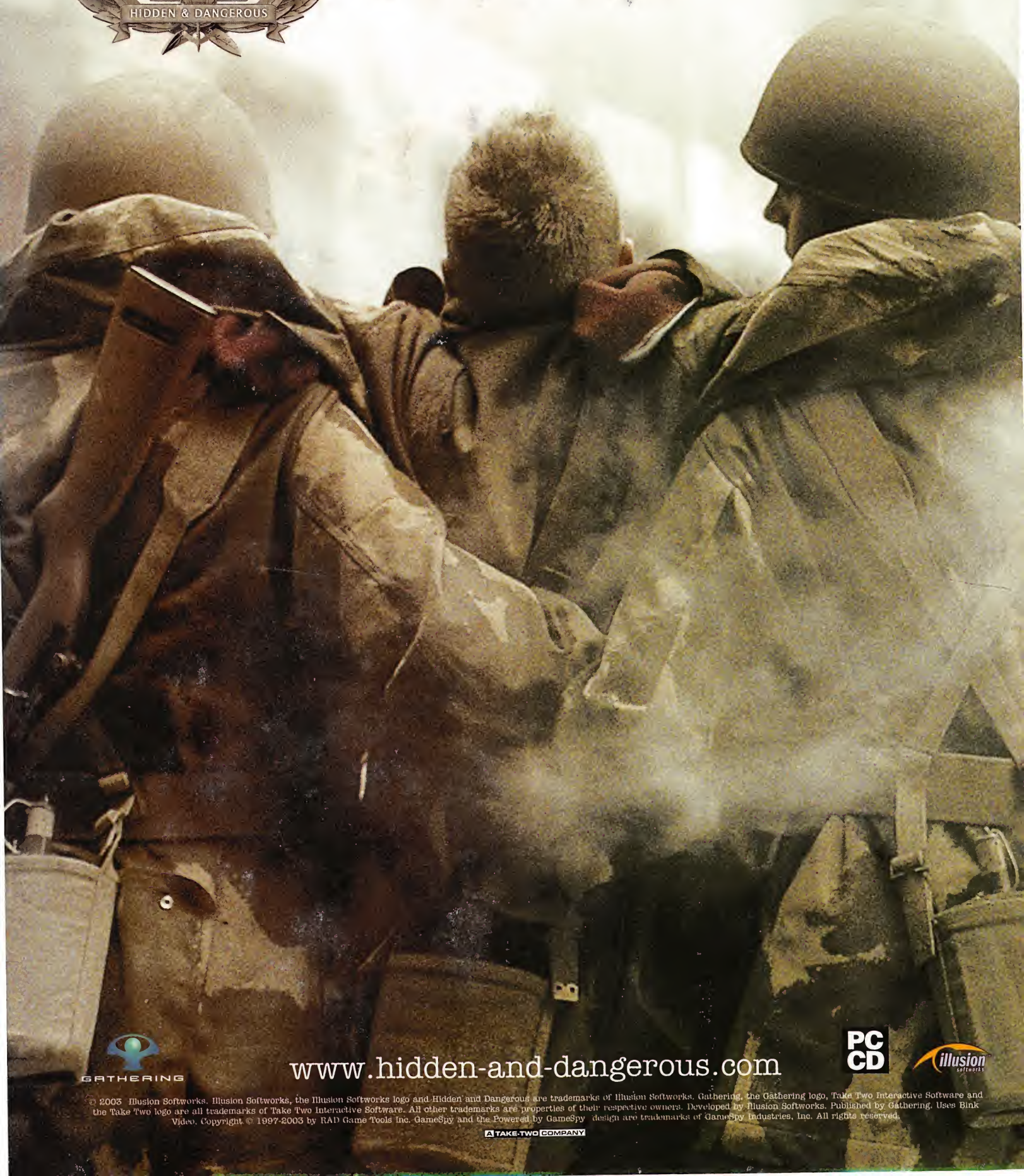
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- 🔥 Tool free assembly design
- 🔥 Dual USB2.0 & IEEE 1394 Firewire in front panel
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- 🔥 4 Ultra silent case fans
- 🔥 Hardcano 9 - Temperature sensor and 4 dials to adjust fan speed

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